

The Life of Blessed

Foanna Mary BONOMO



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The life of blessed Joanna
Mary Bonomo, Benedictine



VERA EFFIGIES

BEATÆ Ioannæ Bonomo Vicentinæ

Ord. ^{is} S. Ben: Monasterij D. Hieronijmi

Civitatis Bassanensis Abbatissæ Obijt An: Salutis M.DC.LX

✓
THE LIFE
OF
Blessed Joanna Mary
✓
BONOMO

BENEDICTINE NUN

IN THE

Monastery of St. Jerome, Bassano



St. Benedict's,
ROME

—❖—
1896.





TO THE
RIGHT REVEREND
D. ROMARICO FLUGI D'ASPERMONT
ABBOT GENERAL
OF THE
CASSINESE CONGREGATION
OF THE
PRIMITIVE OBSERVANCE
TO WHICH
BLESSED JOANNA MARY BELONGED
HER LIFE IS HUMBLY AND GRATEFULLY
DEDICATED
BY
ST. BENEDICT'S ENGLISH DAUGHTERS
IN ROME.



PREFACE.



THANKS to Dom Leo Bracco's two full volumes in Italian, *Vita della B. Giovanna Maria Bonomo* (1883), it has been no difficult task to compile an English life of the Servant of God. The older biographies, mentioned by him in his preface, have also been consulted, and a visit to Bassano where we saw the body of the saint with the sacred stigmata still visible on the feet, the choir where she prayed, the grate where she received Communion, her portrait hanging in the Sacristy, the house of the Brocchi and so many other memories, made Blessed Joanna Mary seem indeed a living reality. The Piazza, where her marble statue towers on its pedestal, is called the *Piazza della Beata*, and Bassano is still proud of its great Benedictine patroness.





THE LIFE OF Blessed Joanna Mary Bonomo

CHAPTER I.

(1606 — 1617)

Her parentage; birth and baptism; childhood; devotion to our Lady. Her mother's illness and death. She herself falls ill. She is sent to S. Clare's at Trent. School-life and departure from S. Clare's.



JOHN Bonomo, the father of Blessed Joanna, was a merchant, whose family records go back to 1493. In that year all the papers belonging to the Bonomos were destroyed by fire in the war with Germany.

Her mother's name was Virginia, and she was the daughter of Gaspar Ceschi. This family still exists and one of its members is the present Grand Master of the Knights of Malta.

Less than a year after their marriage which took place on the 29th of October 1605, their first child was born. It was the morning of the feast of our Lady's Assumption. Both mother and daughter

were in danger of death and the little one was instantly baptised with the name of Mary, indeed so hastily was the saving water poured on the head of the child, that it was done before her sex was known. Surely we may believe that the future Bride of Christ entered this world and the fold of the church thus instantaneously for the same reason as, three centuries before, Saint Mechtildis received a similar grace. "For her baptism was thus hurried on, as was in later years revealed to her, that she might become without delay a temple dedicated to God, and might possess His grace from the very womb of her mother." And not only in this danger at her birth and the hastening of her baptism was Blessed Joanna like that great saint of the Order, to which she herself was later to belong, but in many other points we shall see a resemblance between them. Nor is this strange; the same Rule formed both, the same great Founder was the object of the love, veneration and imitation of each.

John Bonomo felt his faith, which heretofore had not been deep, revive at the danger of his young wife and child. He promised, in case their lives were spared, to make a pilgrimage to the holy house of Loreto. His prayer was granted and five days later, on the feast of St. Bernard, the baby was carried to the church to receive the solemn ceremonies of baptism.

Not long after, the father fulfilled his vow and visited the sanctuary of Loreto, and there he received the grace of submission to the will of God

in the possible sacrifice of his first-born to the Divine Service in years to come. But capable as John Bonomo was at times of a great act of faith, or unusual exercise of virtue, the evil qualities of his character overbalanced the good. Naturally hot-tempered, pugnacious and obstinate, the very affection he bore his wife whom he loved tenderly, led to much suffering for both through the passionate jealousy to which he gave way.

Virginia's character, the proofs given him of her innocence were powerless to persuade him, and he blindly and furiously sought out his supposed enemy whom he ruthlessly assassinated. This was in June, 1607. On one of the dark days that immediately succeeded this act of vengeance, the father and mother with their little daughter, only ten months old, were together in a room. John was, as usual, pouring out bitter lamentations on the grievance which had no existence save in his imagination, when Virginia, throwing herself at his feet, protested her innocence with many tears. Instead of being convinced and calmed, the unhappy man became more infuriated and drew his dagger to strike her, but the child suddenly rose from the corner of the room where she had remained unnoticed, and tottering towards him with outstretched arms, clasped his knees and spoke for the first time. "Oh Father" were her only words, but they were uttered in such a piteous tone that it went to the father's heart; he replaced the dagger, took her in his arms and kissed

her. Peace was restored, and jealousy no longer made the lives of the parents miserable. Soon after, John Bonomo was arrested for the assassination of his unfortunate victim, and taken to the prison of Vicenza. His incarceration was to last for some years, but the term appears to have been shortened.

In 1610, when Mary was four years old, she ran to her mother one evening, crying : " Rejoice, my mother, for my father will soon return to us." Virginia, pressing the child to her bosom, replied : " Poor little one, your love makes you think so because you want him to return, but God knows all about it." " But," she persisted, " I have just seen him leave the prison and he will be here soon." A little later she said again : " Mother, my father is on the way and you will see that he will be here in the morning." The mother, her voice choked with tears, could only say : " O my daughter, you are dreaming." But Mary would not be silent and exclaimed : " No, mother, I am sure that he will come and he will find us in bed." The next morning John Bonomo arrived at home before they were up.

The joy of reunion was soon saddened by the illness of the ex-prisoner, in consequence of the hardships he had undergone ; he was impatient and discontented ; neither the assiduity of the physician, nor the loving care that surrounded him, reconciled him to his state. And it seemed hard indeed, that coming out of a long imprisonment and

looking forward to the joys of liberty, he should be immediately deprived of his new found independence. But his faith saved him; and, brought to the gates of death, he bethought him to have the holy name of Jesus written on a piece of paper and laid upon his breast. With fervent prayer, his little daughter carried out his wish and he was instantly cured.

Even at this age the child was the trusted friend of both her parents, her character seemed already formed and she displayed a sense and prudence far beyond her years, showing indications too of the life to which God had destined her. She refused to wear all coloured or expensive clothes, modesty and simplicity were the distinctive marks of her dress, and she put aside even the traditional ornaments of every Venetian. Gifts made to her were given to the poor, even to her very clothes, for, being asked one day by a ragged boy with bare feet for an alms, she took off her shoes and apron and gave them to him.

In one thing especially she reminds us of the youth of St. Benedict. She had a great devotion to Our Lady and loved to recite her little office and pray before her picture in a country-house belonging to the family, about three miles distant from Assiago. To satisfy her devotion she was accustomed to retire to pray, many times during the day, under a staircase which is still preserved with veneration. This incident will recall St. Benedict to anyone who has visited the quaint church of St. Benedict in Piscinula at Rome.

There on the site of the ancient palace of the Anicii, of which there are still some remains, is shown the place where the great Patriarch is said to have slept and prayed when a young boy. There, too, formerly, was the fresco of our Lady and her divine Son, before which he made his vow of chastity before his flight to Subiaco.

The biographers of our little saint would seem to imply that her acquaintance with latin was perhaps supernaturally acquired. Thus she was again being unconsciously prepared for the grand old Order she was later to join, and was in full touch with the great monastic saints. St. Gertrude, St. Mechtildis, and St. Hildegarde, as well as many of our Anglo-Saxon saints, are examples of an early love for the language of the Church's liturgy.

She delighted in teaching christian doctrine and explaining the truths of faith, and this she did with so much clearness and fulness as to surprise those who heard her. The poor were her most loved pupils, and amongst them were not only children, but young girls, and even women. She never allowed them to feel the superiority of her position, but made herself one of them. Her devotion to the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass was very great, and, when possible, she daily assisted at it. On one occasion, when only four years old, she received a very wonderful grace at the first High Mass of a young priest; at the moment of the Elevation she beheld Our Lord in the Sacred Host, surrounded and adored by Angels. At the same time she

received many lights concerning the Blessed Eucharist, the mysteries of the Unity and Trinity of God, and the Incarnation of Our Lord. The vision disappeared and left behind it great devotion, faith and light, with such an appreciation of the privilege of hearing Mass, that she resolved never to let a day pass without doing so. Her desire for Communion was so intense, that it often seemed to her as though she had received It.

All these graces received in childhood, inspired her with so much gratitude, that in after life she wrote the following touching act of thanksgiving.

August 15th 1606.

I give Thee thanks, oh Lord Almighty, Eternal God, for all the benefits of my whole life, for which be praise to Thee for ever.

My birth—which took place on the above-mentioned year and day—was safely brought to pass by the merits and intercession of the most blessed Virgin Mary, Thy Mother. When I and my mother were in great peril we were restored to life in consideration of a vow which my father had made to visit the Holy House of Loreto. As it seemed that I should die before my birth, I was baptised ere I was born and as my sex was still unknown I was given the name of Mary. Life was given back to me, and my mother brought me safely forth.

I give Thee thanks now, not only for having been delivered from death, but also for my baptism before my birth.

I grieve that through ignorance I stained in a few years my innocence, but I give Thee thanks that when I was five years old a beautiful vision was

vouchsafed to me. I had been taken to hear Solemn Mass for the first time, and the church was crowded with people. After the Elevation of the Most Holy Eucharist, I saw a bright light and two little angels reverently holding the Sacred Host above the head of the Priest. Imagining that every one else had also seen what I saw, I was astonished that no signs of awe were manifested at the vision. Many years afterwards I learnt that others had not seen that which was made plain to my bodily eyes.

An understanding of that most Blessed Sacrament remained after this in my soul, with such faith, that it never left me or grew faint, nor could I afterwards pass even a single day without being present at Holy Mass.

About a year after I had been so wondrously enlightened regarding this great Mystery, Thou didst grant to me, oh Ineffable Goodness, to understand the Scriptures with an increase of devotion, and didst give me a desire to frequent the church Thy sanctuary.

For all these things I praise and bless Thy great mercy.¹

¹ Gratias tibi ago Domine omnipotens æterne Deus pro omnibus beneficiis tuis toto tempore vitæ meæ, de quibus omnibus etiam sit tibi laus. In mea Nativitate (quæ fuit in supradictò anno et die) disposuit meritis et intercessionem Sanctissimæ Virginis Mariæ Matris tuæ; quod cum essem cum matre mea in periculo mortis pro voto factò a patre meo Lauretanam Sanctissimam Domum visitandi revixi. Ego jam incipiebam nasci, et timentes quod essem moritura, baptizavere me nescientes an fœmina aut masculus essem, imponentes mihi nomen Mariæ. Factò autem voto revixi, et mater peperit me sine malo.

Gratias nunc tibi ago, quia non solum liberasti nos a morte, sed etiam quod fui baptizata antequam bene nata.

Doleo quia propter ignorantiam meam in paucis annis maculavi innocentiam meam.

God Himself was forming this child, and, like many great and holy souls, she had a mother who helped to carry out His designs. Virginia was a good woman, but she was more than is generally implied by those words, for not only did she manage her house well and attend sedulously to her exercises of piety, but she aimed at higher perfection. She put aside all external and useless show, and all worldly vanity. She always dressed in black, passed much time in prayer, and seemed in many ways more a religious than a secular.

A son and two daughters, besides Mary, had been born to her; these all died young. Mary was only six years old when Virginia became grievously ill, and was on this account sent to the family villa

Sed etiam gratias ago cum toto corde meo, quia cum essem in anno quinto ætatis meæ et starem in Ecclesia ad audiendam missam solemnem primam cum multo gentium concursu post elevationem Sanctissimæ Eucharistiæ vidi duos Angelos parvulos cum magna luce tenentes cum reverentia magna Sanctissimam Hostiam elevatam super caput Sacerdotis. Ego existimabam omnes videre quod ego videbam stupens quod non darent signum cum reverentia de illa visione, sed post multos annos cognovi quod non omnes viderunt.

Remansit in me in anima mea intelligentia de tali Sanctissimo Sacramento cum tali fide, quæ nunquam mihi defuit, nec minuta fuit, nec potui deinceps remanere, nec uno die, quo non essem præsens et audiens Sanctissimam Missam.

Transacto uno anno circiter post dictam gratiam dum audirem missam, dedisti mihi, o summa Bonitas, ut intelligerem scripturam cum augmento devotionis, et desiderii frequentandi Ecclesiam : et pro ista laudo, et benedico summam clementiam tuam.

by her father, with many injunctions to pray for her mother. He knew the efficacy of his child's prayers, and who can say what graces they obtained for the poor young invalid who bore her illness with wonderful patience and conformity to the holy Will of God. A painful feature of her delirium was the fancy that her husband stood over her with a drawn dagger, which he pointed at her eyes. But she was strengthened by the sight of her Angel Guardian and St. Francis of Assisi, her special patron, who appeared to her and consoled her.

One care, especially, weighed on her mind. She feared that if, as she foresaw, Mary should wish, when old enough, to become a nun, her father might try and prevent it, she, therefore, called him to her bedside and entreated him to allow their child to answer the call of God. She was the more anxious about this, as she recalled, with sorrow, that she had wished to consecrate herself, when a girl, to the immediate service of God, but had been over-persuaded into marrying by her relations, and she now hoped that God might accept her child in her stead.

From the absence of one who had soothed the father's couch, but was far from the mother in a case of greater danger, it would seem that this illness was infectious. But Mary though absent in body was present in spirit, and one day, standing in the verandah of the country-house and looking up, she saw her mother ascending into heaven, on a brilliant cloud blessing her as she went. At

this sight, which she believed all could see, she cried out: "Run, run, and see my lady mother going into Paradise." At that moment Virginia did indeed depart this life. A few moments before her death she had begun to sing the Litany of our Lady, but when she came to the words *Regina Martyrum* she was silent, her soul had taken its flight to heaven, assisted, as her daughter always asserted, by that Queen of Martyrs and Virgin of Sorrows, to whom she had been so devoted on earth. She was only twenty-seven at the time of her death.

Not long after this, little Mary and her two year old cousin, who lived in the same house, became very ill with small-pox. The younger child, who had been kept throughout her illness in a separate room, died, and Mary was not told, but when her father came to see her, she said, "Baby is dead, she died at such an hour," naming the exact time, "I saw her going up to heaven in company with other little angels. I wanted to follow, and begged her to wait a little and take me with her; but she answered "No, you must wait, your time has not yet come."

Mary recovered and for the next three years lived with her father who loved her devotedly. At the end of that time he thought of placing her in some convent to be educated according to her position, and as he had many friends in Trent, he settled on the noble monastery of St. Clare in that city, which enjoyed a deservedly high reputation. It was situated in the Borgo of Santa Croce outside

the gate, and had been founded in the thirteenth century; there he took Mary in March 1615. She soon became a favourite pupil of the nuns, from whom she received the ordinary education of the time. As she learnt to embroider in gold, she laboured incessantly for the church, and very soon it was remarked that her work was hardly ever out of her hands. Her naturally expressive and clear voice proved valuable in the refectory, where she had to take her turn in reading, and having besides a good ear, she was soon noted for her progress in singing and playing on the violin, an instrument much used by the community in their services. Her voice was full of expression, and she loved to employ it in the praise of God, probably even then thinking of that perpetual Praise to which her life was to be devoted. We know very little more of the limited education she received, but her inner teaching was not circumscribed. Daily she grew in the knowledge of God, and increased her efforts to please Him. Although the pupils of St. Clare's were not, of course, accustomed to follow the exercises of the nuns, yet to do so was Mary's great delight. She was not only assiduous at the choir, but also at the hours of prayer; she kept their fasts and even took the discipline. But with soul athirst for more communion with her God, she habitually rose at night from her little bed. At a latticed window of a tribune overlooking the church, where her Beloved dwelt in the silence of the tabernacle, she passed whole hours in sweet

converse with Him. But she did not think only of herself at such times, for the souls in purgatory, as well as those on earth, had a large share in her prayers. Looking forward to her first Communion with great longing, and continually beseeching her confessor to allow her this privilege, though she was only a little over nine, by her earnest entreaties and her assurances that she could not live without it, she prevailed over him. He submitted her to an examination on this Holy Sacrament, and was amazed at her wonderful knowledge, and her clearness in explaining the teaching of the Church.

The days previous to her first Communion were spent in earnest prayer, and in making a general confession of her faults and failings, and at last the desire of her soul was accomplished and she received her God into her pure young heart. A new epoch in her life had begun. The desire to give herself up to the service of God in the cloister grew stronger, but as she knew this could not be for some years, she resolved at least, to do all she could to bind herself to Him, and made a vow of perpetual virginity before a picture of our Lady. Mary wishing to know if God accepted her offering, asked in her simplicity as a proof, for the cure of one of the nuns who was dying of a quinsy. The answer was instantaneous and complete, for the nun was suddenly cured, and thus the child was relieved of all doubt of the acceptability of her offering to God and our Lady.

A couple of years later, she felt that she must write and ask her father if, when the time came, he would oppose her becoming a nun. Her anxiety on this score was preying on her health; she felt sure of her own dispositions, and she was also aware that the nuns at St. Clare would willingly receive her. So, even though she had to wait, her mind could be at rest if she knew that the chief obstacle had been removed.

John Bonomo had married again in 1617. His second wife, Louisa Paurinfaint, who was of a noble and ancient family of Trent, had three children, one only of whom, Margaret, survived her.

When John received his child's letter he flew into a fury and accusing the nuns of influencing her, commanded that she should straightway be sent home. His letter had hardly reached her when he arrived at the monastery himself. Mary met him with tears and sighs, but without speaking a word. Her father remained unmoved; he had made up his mind and was not to be shaken; the intercession of the nuns who were present was useless; he would listen to none of their proposals. Finding this they had recourse to extraordinary means, and threatened to shave off the girl's beautiful hair, if he persisted in taking her from them. How they reconciled themselves to such a course, and how they could put themselves into such violent opposition to a father in regard to his own child, as to threaten such a thing, we are not told; incredible as it seems, it is true, and it is still

more strange that these last tactics in some measure prevailed. Bonomo's fury seemed calmed and he proposed to take the child home for a short time, that she might see a little of the world and then return to the monastery.

This was an ordinary practice with those about to take the veil, and the nuns, believing he spoke in good faith, consented. The parting was sad between pupil and mistresses, all the more on the part of the former, as she had a strong presentiment that she would never again see the beloved inmates of St. Clare. In this she was correct for she never returned. She did not yet know all the secret of God's love and His designs over her.

CHAPTER II.

(1617 — 1622)

Home-life. Her father consents to her entering Saint Jerome's at Bassano. Her clothing.



MARY went with her father to their home at Assiago, and the next two years were spent with him in that town and at Vicenza, where they had many near relations.

Vicenza is delightfully situated on the river Bacchiglione and bounded on the south by the Berici mountains. In the saint's time it was the principal city of the Venetian state, and had a large

population, great industries, and rich ground for agricultural purposes. There was no lack of worldly amusements for Mary; distractions were forced upon her, and efforts were made to induce her to marry. Her family connections, her good looks, her accomplishments, her sweetness of character would have been quite enough to attract suitors, even without the considerable dowry inherited as the only surviving child of her mother, and her father's patrimony that one day would be divided between her and her half-sister Margaret.

But earthly love had no attraction for one who could say —

I hear a voice you cannot hear
Forbidding me to stay,
I see a hand you cannot see
Which beckons me away.

It was indeed true that a voice spoke in low but persuasive tones to her heart, and therefore she was content not to argue but to wait for the gradual development of events. But her waiting was accompanied by fervent prayer and penance, and in this last she was not left by God to her own will alone. He proved her with dryness, anguish of spirit and temptation, pain far out-weighting that which she could inflict on herself, and which had proportionate result in strengthening and purifying her soul. Apart from this, her home life was happy and pleasant; her step-mother was like a second mother; her father was tenderly attached to her; he was willing to gratify every wish, except that of

becoming a nun, and in this he remained obstinate. Humanly speaking, it seemed hopeless to expect ever to gain his consent, but it was gained at last, and this was how it came about. He went into a church one day during a sermon, and while he listened, it appeared to him that the preacher was speaking for him alone, and during the whole time fixed his eyes upon him. The subject of the discourse was the harm parents do, not only to their children, but to themselves, when they oppose a true vocation; the account they have to render to God, and much more to the same effect.

John Bonomo listened; his conscience awoke and said, "Thou art the man," and he knew it spoke truly. He was, as we have seen before, a man of good impulses, but his faith was sometimes dormant, yet, if once it was roused, he acted on it; so now he made no delay, and walking straight home, called Mary and said to her, "My child, if you still persist in wishing to become a religious, I will no longer oppose you, carry out your desire, only, instead of returning to Trent, choose one of the monasteries of Vicenza." No doubt he wished her to be near him and her relations when he added this condition, and his child's acceptance of it proved to him that her desire to become a nun was not merely affection for the kind mistresses by whom she had been educated, but a real call to serve God for His own sake. Indeed, Mary had very defined ideas of what she wanted. She seemed to think little about the order although the

strictness and regularity of the monastery were of supreme importance to her. This indifference is not at all uncommon in those who wish to give themselves to God in religion; many young people go to the noviceship of the order where they have been educated because they happen to know it, others have a decided taste for teaching, nursing, contemplation, or penance as the case may be, and go wherever they find their attraction; few, comparatively, choose an order for its rule, its traditions, its history, its roll of saints, its work in the Church.

All this is more objective than what they seek at the moment, and it is only after they have entered that they find how they are getting assimilated to the order, and become a part of the family of the founder. They appreciate, love and grow in enthusiasm for the garden, in which God has planted them in His Church, and so realise the words, "I have chosen you and not you Me."

Mary Bonomo, then, was willing to enter any monastery where the observance of rule was exact, the choir zealously carried out, and where there was a spirit of prayer and penance. All this her father found for her at St. Jerome's, a monastery in Bassano, situated in the Borgo Leone, and of the ancient order of St. Benedict. It had been founded rather more than a hundred years previously under curious circumstances.

A certain Louis Rizzo, becoming a widower, resolved to give all his goods to the poor and retire from the world. His two children had set him the

example, his son by becoming a Benedictine in the famous monastery of St. Justina at Padua, while his daughter entered St. Sebastian's at Bassano. For seven years their father lived in various solitudes as a hermit, but at last found his place of rest under the lofty old ivy-clad walls of Bassano. There he gave himself wholly to the service of God, fulfilling the promise of his youth not wanting in signs of holiness. Fasting, penance and prayer occupied his days and often his nights. The fame of his sanctity spread, and some holy women obtained permission to build cells at a short distance from his; they never left their little enclosure and in all their earthly cares trusted to divine providence. Their number grew, and in due time a church and monastery were built and dedicated to St. Jerome. They adopted the rule of St. Benedict, finding none more fitted to their desires after perfection, and no doubt Louis Rizzo's connection with the order had been the means of giving them a love and appreciation of it. Thus began the monastery of St. Jerome. The town in which it was situated is fifteen miles from Vicenza and forms part of the Venetian states. Built upon a gentle declivity on the eastern or left bank of the river Brenta it thus saved the tradition *Benedictus colles amabat*, below is the great Paduan plain, around are hills, or mountains as they would be called in some countries, covered with the spreading vine and the silver olive, and still further off the grand Tyrolese Alps. In the middle of the town

risers the once fortified tower of the tyrant Ezzelino.

At St. Jerome's matters were soon arranged with regard to Mary's entry; her family was well known, as her first cousin, the daughter of her father's sister, was already a nun within its walls. Before taking her there, Bonomo was anxious to let her see Venice and some other places she had never visited, but the girl refused. For two years she had been kept in the world against her wish and now that she was free she longed only, like a tired dove, to fly to the refuge of the cloister. Her father yielded and took her to the monastery on June 21st, the feast of St. Aloysius, then lately beatified, to whom she was through life very devout. Mary, notwithstanding all she had gone through, was not quite fifteen at this time, and she mixed with the pupils and followed their studies during the ten or eleven weeks which intervened before she received the habit, but she still kept to her former practices of prayer and penance. A manual of meditation by Vincenzo Bruno, a book in use at the monastery, was given to her by the nun who had charge of her, and helped her greatly.

The feast of the Assumption, her fifteenth birthday, at length came and with it the joy of entering the noviceship. The new postulant endeared herself to all around her, and it was without difficulty that she obtained consent to receive the holy habit. The day for her clothing was fixed for the feast of our Lady's Nativity.

What shall we say of that day, of that ceremony? Is it possible for us to enter into the happiness of that pure soul on the day of her Betrothal, to realise the ecstatic joy of this beginning of her public dedication to Him Who was indeed the God of her heart? How that heart bounded as she was despoiled of her worldly garments, her hair cut off, and the various parts of the monastic dress put on her by the high priest of God. One by one she was clothed in the Habit, emblematic of humility of heart and contempt of the world; the Girdle significant of chastity; the Scapular, of the sweet yoke and light burden she was taking on herself, and the pure white Veil, the sign of love and obedience. So robed, a lighted candle was put into her hand, that she might remember to keep that lamp burning without which she could not be admitted to the eternal nuptials.

With what loving impatience at the end of the ceremony, she implored the nuns to admit her into the enclosure, singing "Open to me the gates of justice, for having entered in, I will confess to the Lord." Yes, now the probation of her grand life of Divine Praise was to begin.

That it might be perfect she was to be tried with the trials of the noviceship. Under her new name Joanna, which had been added to her baptismal one of Mary, she was to commence another life, a life of one great idea — the *Work of God*.

CHAPTER III.

(1622 — 1623)

Life in the noviceship; visions. Election
of Abbess. Profession.



ISTER Joanna was welcomed to the noviceship by her sisters with the heartiness and affection traditional in the Order. As she saw herself in the livery of St. Benedict she could only repeat again and again in tones which drew tears from those who heard her: "And have I really obtained what I so much desired!" Her joy so overflowed that it was shared by those around her. Anguish and trials had been her portion, and might be again, but in the meantime God was inundating her soul with happiness, a happiness which was always intensified at the moment of Communion, when our hidden Lord seemed to love to manifest Himself to her. Once in particular she saw Him appear surrounded by great light, and heard Him say: "Beloved bride of Mine, I pray thee love Me." Nor need we be surprised, it is not the first time that the Sacred Heart has stooped to ask our love, is He not ever seeking, ever waiting for that one thing which we can give, and the one thing that He demands?

At another time, going to the altar and accompanied by angels, she heard these words: "Have confidence, for His glory shall be seen in thee, and He Himself will renew Jerusalem."

The year preceding profession is in all orders a time of trial; trial of the dispositions, and the earnestness and fitness for community life of the aspirant. In the words of St. Benedict, he who is charged with the all-important office of watching these souls, must do so "narrowly and carefully," marking especially whether the novice truly seeks God, and is eager for the work of God, for obedience and humiliation; and then the holy Legislator adds: "Let all the rigour and austerity by which we tend towards God be laid before him," for the test has to disclose two sides, the fitness of the soul that wishes to consecrate itself to the service of God in the cloister, and the suitability of the cloister for that soul.

No influence is used to persuade the novice to stay, on the contrary, it would seem that the various trials, the almost exaggerated difficulties made about the life he wishes to embrace would daunt his courage, if not drive him away. But St. Benedict did not want craven or pusillanimous souls, though he would take them and try to strengthen and elevate them. If this fails, what place have they amidst the sternness of monasticism, amongst the followers of the Crucified? Is it hard to see that this severe novitiate is a merciful thing? Without it how many might take upon themselves a life for which they are unfitted, though, with it, there is little danger of mistake. He well knew, too, how to mingle hope with present difficulty, for admitting that things are "strait and difficult in the begin-

ning," his children are assured that "in process of time and long continuance in this holy course and method of life, when the heart has once been enlarged, the way of God's commandments is run with unspeakable sweetness of love." Indeed, the trials to which a novice is subjected do not bring unhappiness; on the contrary, there is found in them a depth of peaceful joy which springs from willing acceptance, for as Fenelon says: "Where there is no resistance of the will, there is no suffering."

Blessed Joanna's obedience and simplicity as well as her spirit of prayer were the edification of her companions in the noviceship, but she had another gift not usual in so young a girl, that of rare prudence. It is, therefore, not surprising that her mistress of novices should have confided to her a trouble that was agitating the monastery.

It was the time for the election of another Abbess. St. Jerome's had not the privilege of an Abbess elected for life, a grace which leads to so much peace, union, family feeling and reverence for those appointed by God, and installed in their office by that wonderful rite in the *Pontificale*, which is one of the Church's early traditions. There was discord in the monastery and serious difficulties arose. Joanna was told to pray, and she did so earnestly, and during her prayer she saw in spirit a certain nun on her knees before our Lady. By an interior light she knew this was the religious who would be elected Abbess, not only for that time, but also for the two periods following. She related

what she had seen to her mistress of novices saying she believed this was the person to be elected. On being questioned as to which of the nuns she had seen, her answer was, "Dame Hypolita," the last professed who had made her vows only that year. It seemed out of the question that the plurality of votes should be given to her, and some of them from the most ancient among the religious, but it all fell out as Joanna had predicted, and the young Abbess governed the community to the glory of God, and with satisfaction to her subjects.

Twelve months fled quickly and the 8th September 1622 was at hand. A voice was calling Joanna: "Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one and come." The solemn day of her profession was very near, and the bride prepared herself. She had been elected by the votes of the community and it was decided that the feast of the Nativity should witness the consummation, as that of the Assumption had witnessed the beginning of her espousals. During the year she had made, as is customary, a general confession of her whole life, and there was little left to do except to intensify her longing love, purify her heart more and more, and with earnest prayer await the great day.

It came at last. The church was crowded with people, most of whom were connections of the bride. The ceremony began, and with all the fervour of her soul she sang in answer to the *Veni* of the prelate who officiated: — *I come with all my heart; I fear Thee, I seek to see Thy Face; O*

Lord confound me not, but do to me according to Thy loving kindness and to the multitude of Thy mercies.

Then, standing, she began to read the formula of profession which she had, according to the Rule, written with her own hand. Stability, Conversion of manners, and Obedience, the three Benedictine vows, were the golden chains which she was weaving round her. Suddenly she ceased, the form half finished. — A vision rose before her, and in ecstasy she saw our Lord, the most beautiful amongst the sons of men, accepting her offering. He was accompanied by His holy Mother, the glorious Patriarch St. Benedict and other saints and angels. Besides her angel guardian, another of great beauty named Aureus was also assigned to her; our Lord encircled her neck with three chains of pure gold, telling her that she was herself to enrich, ornament and beautify them with precious stones, pearls and enamel. The three chains represented the three vows she had just made, and the precious stones were the exercise of the virtues of poverty, obedience, chastity and the other obligations of her Rule.

The nuns at this interruption of the ceremony, nay, of the very formula of profession, were amazed; they thought of the impression that might be made on the seculars present and did all they could to bring the novice to herself; they pulled her habit, they called her by name, but with no effect. When the vision was over she continued the reading of her vows, then signed the parchment

with her name and a cross, and with jubilee of heart sang the *Suscipe*. Thrice she sang it, each time raising her voice, and thrice the community repeated it. O the ineffable joy felt by every son and daughter of St. Benedict as those words, — echoed in his multitudinous cloisters for the last fourteen centuries, — rise to the roof of the choir and ascend before the throne of God, asking Him not to disappoint the soul that has given up all for Him; a song of entreaty : — *Uphold me O Lord because of Thine own word and if Thou dost, I shall live*; — live in the highest, best and broadest sense of the word — *and let me not be confounded in my expectation*.

Then the assistance of the saints was invoked; the Cowl, that distinctive monastic dress, blessed and given, — that dress in which the Work of God was to be sung, that dress emblematic of the robe of everlasting bliss for which it was one day to be exchanged. She was veiled in the black Veil, the sign of the irrevocable offering just made : — *He has put His seal on my face, that I may admit no other lover than Him*.

Then the prelate intoned the words : *Come, beloved, to be espoused, winter is passing, the turtle is singing and the flowering vines give forth a sweet smell*. The newly professed going up to him, he put the ring on her finger with the words by which many of God's brides in Anglo-Saxon time were wedded : *I espouse thee to Jesus Christ, Son of the most High God, that He may keep thee without*

blemish. *Receive therefore the ring of Faith, the seal of the Holy Ghost, that thou mayest be called the spouse of God, and if thou servest Him faithfully, mayest be crowned for ever.* With what joy was he not answered by that sweet young voice: *I am espoused to Him, Whom the angels serve, Whose beauty the sun and moon admire;* and raising her hand to shew her ring, she continued with exultation: *My Lord Jesus Christ has put upon me His ring and has decorated me with a wreath as His Bride.* Having received the crown on her head, she sang in the words of the sweet Roman virgin and martyr, St. Agnes: *The Lord has clothed me with a royal robe woven in gold.*

What were Joanna's feelings as she sang again, in anticipation, the words so peculiarly appropriate to her: — *Behold, what I have desired, I now see; what I have hoped for, I now hold fast; I am now joined to Him in Heaven, Whom when on earth I loved with all the devotion of my heart.* Then Holy Communion put the seal on her joy, she received *milk and honey from His lips and His Blood flowed in her veins.* Her life's work was put into her hands, as, kneeling before the celebrant she received from him her Breviary, the Office she was undertaking. And the young Abbess, Dame Hypolita, in whose hands she had made her vows, and who had preceded her in her espousals only during that year, received the consecrated virgin with the solemn injunction from the bishop: *Keep her, deliver her up without spot, and be ready*

to give an account of her before the Tribunal of her Spouse, the Judge to come.

The profession had taken place on Thursday, and according to an ancient custom in the Order, the bride remained in strictest silence and retreat until Saturday morning, in honour of our Lord's three days in the tomb. Wonderful was the union of Blessed Joanna with Him during this time, and wonderful His work in her soul. In one vision she seemed to be herself before the throne of the Blessed Trinity, where she heard the praises of God sung by the saints and angels; God the Son placed upon her finger three rings set, one with a diamond, another with a ruby, the third with a sapphire; these rings were so connected as to form but one, thus representing the Holy Trinity, the Three in One. As He put it on her, He said the words: "Father, I pray they may be one," thus making Joanna understand the closeness of the union with Him to which God called her, and to which her profession would be the great means.



CHAPTER IV.

(1623 — 1625)

Love of Divine Office and Mass. Assiduity in prayer. Penance, and transports of Divine Love.



JOANNA'S life as a professed daughter of St. Benedict had now begun : — "Let nothing be preferred to — be put before — the work of God," he had said, and as it is the first and most loved duty of every Benedictine community, so, in proportion to their holiness, is it greatly loved by his children.

Dame Joanna had learnt to love the Divine Office as a little schoolgirl, and now this love was intensified ; it was no longer a devotion, but a duty. It brought her into direct communication with the Blessed Trinity. The Divine Office and Mass formed a circle, the one completing and yet interweaving the other. Her whole spiritual life was necessarily formed and coloured by the Liturgy. Beautiful as it is in itself, much as it grows upon the soul, and its breadth, depth and inexhaustiveness open out day by day, it no doubt had a special attraction for the newly professed. She could throw her whole self into the work of the choir without the difficulties which often mar the pleasure of one less gifted ; there was no trouble in learning to sing, for ear and voice were perfect. A still greater help, one not to be exaggerated,

was her knowledge of latin; and so with no drawbacks she could give herself up to the Praise of God.

At St. Jerome's the letter of the Rule was observed, and the nuns rose to matins during the night according to the feast and time of the year. This was a special delight to our saint, and she loved to fulfil her holy Legislator's desire and be before her sisters at the Work of God. In fact she was sometimes allowed to rise two hours before them, so that she might have more time for prayer, and in consequence had not much sleep on her little straw bed. Father Faber tells us that cold and want of sleep are the last mortifications to which we should subject ourselves, but Joanna had long accustomed herself, young as she was, to refuse her body all but absolute necessities.

Although the Divine Office was her first and most loved duty, there were others imposed on her by community life, which she performed with great affection and interest. In each sister she recognised the Spouse of Christ and the temple of the Holy Ghost, and asked for no greater honour than to serve them. The sick, especially, were the objects of her tender care, and not long after her profession she was entrusted with the congenial task of nursing them. Into this office she threw her whole heart, creeping to their beds before going to matins to see if they wanted anything, and, if she could supply a want, did so in the tenderest and most

motherly way. No patient had need to feel lonely whilst she was at hand, for her sweet face was seen constantly in the infirmary, and her joyous manner brightened isolation from community life. She was considerate, too, for the irritability and weaknesses of the sick, soothing, comforting and patiently bearing with them, because, as St. Benedict says, "there is gotten from such a more abundant reward;" and what is that reward? Surely a greater realisation of Christ's presence in souls and the honour of serving Him, for has He not said? — "I was sick and ye visited me," and, "what ye did to one of these, my least brethren, ye did to Me." Most truly did the young bride of Christ realise this, and "before and above all things took special care of the sick, who were served in very deed as Christ Himself." To those who knew they were in their last illness, she seemed an angel who would never leave them, until with acts of faith, hope and charity they had given up their souls to Him who had created, redeemed and espoused them. Like many other saints, she used to say that the very ornaments of the church should be sold to provide not only necessities, but comforts for the sick; she shrank from no service for them, however distasteful or humble; with her faith and love such services were neither disagreeable nor lowly, and the very sense of her cheerful devotion lightened the grievousness of illness to many a patient. But though Joanna did these greater things she did not neglect others of less importance,

and it was with childlike joy that she would carry off to her beloved sick any little present that was given to her. The sweetmeats, fruit and flowers, frequently sent to her by her father and friends, all found their way to them.

But the infirmary was by no means her only employment. She took her turn with her sisters in the work of the kitchen, so far as it was allowed to the choir nuns; in serving in the refectory; in sweeping and dusting and any other humble occupation she could find : and was unusually clever with her needle. The community — composed at her profession of forty nuns — was not rich, and they were obliged to sell their work. Joanna had learnt to embroider very beautifully when at St. Clare's in Trent, and this talent was of great service to her now. Orders came in for embroidered flowers and figures of Saints for vestments, gold work and such like. On the 30th Nov. 1640 she wrote to her father: "We have already made for the crib in the best way we could manage, the Blessed Virgin and St. Joseph, the three shepherds, two angels and an ass and ox. I expected that my aunt Giacoma would send me some cloth of gold which she had promised, as I had arranged to dress the Magi with it, but neither she nor I have been able to procure it. I have written to her that I will still wait because everything is finished except the dress, but I greatly fear it will not arrive in time, — here I cannot find anything suitable."

Amongst her other talents was one for designing. It was a natural gift, as she had never learnt, and yet, was it natural? for there is a story attached to at least one of her designs. One morning at Mass, we are told, the Gospel was read in which are the words, *Beatus venter qui te portavit et ubera quæ suxisti*, and after Communion our Lady appeared to her and said that she wished to be portrayed as she appeared and with the above mentioned words. Joanna excused herself saying she did not know how to paint, but our Lady promised to help her. The work was commenced without delay, and the result was beyond anything Joanna had ever done. After her death an engraving was made of this painting, and was inserted amongst the *Opuscoli Bassanesi*, where it can still be seen in the Communal Library. The Blessed Virgin is represented with the Divine Child who holds a cross in His hand; her mantle is ornamented with six crosses, another surmounts her diadem, and she presses another to her heart. *Beatus venter qui te portavit*, are the words underneath, and around, *Fecit mihi magna qui potens est et sanctum nomen*.

Not only on such occasions did this fervent soul find her work a prayer; at all times she strove to be united to God; He was the beginning and end, ever present before her, and all else was a means to be used for this one object. Her biographers tell us that for the first seven years of her monastic life she was sensibly conscious of Christ's presence with her; at all times and in all places, in

choir or cell, at prayer or at work He was with her, coming as a familiar friend. During those years she felt no loneliness, the Beloved of her soul, He to Whom she had dedicated her life, her heart and soul, came to her so often, that sight, and not faith, was her part. He appeared in many forms, sometimes as a child of three; then, as He was when found in the temple after the three days loss; at the ages of sixteen, eighteen and twenty those years enshrouded with silence in the Gospel, and during which time we know that "He went down to Nazareth and was subject to them"; and lastly at the age of His entrance into public life. At all these ages Joanna was accustomed to see Him and in her simple faith she never doubted that it was He. She loved Him and He loved her, and thus there was nothing surprising in such visits. The very fact of these constant visions, their very commonplaceness to her, at least show how full her thoughts were of Him, how familiar was His unseen presence.

The proof of Blessed Joanna's life of prayer and inner union with God was in her practical virtue. Her charity and love for the sick have been already noticed, but they were rivalled by her obedience and spirit of poverty; she was accustomed to say that "she who does anything without the approval of superiors is the devil's workman." Her actions and words were in accord, for her obedience was complete as we shall see while studying her life; complete, too, not in ordinary

things, but at times when obedience was the hardest thing that could be asked from her. Her practice of poverty was extreme; in her cell she had not even the strictest necessaries, and as she lay on her straw pallet, one coverlet only protected her from the cold of northern Italy. The crucifix at the head of her bed, and on the wall a picture of our Lady and the Divine Infant laid on straw in a manger, were her examples and her strength: her habit was the worst, the oldest and most patched that she could get, and she rejoiced in it as a garment of great honour. Those about her thought she carried her spirit and practice of poverty too far, and that she made herself singular by it, but Joanna would remind them of the great obligation contracted by those who have voluntarily embraced a state of poverty. She thoroughly grasped the true idea of religious poverty when she would not look on anything as her own, but considered everything as lent to her. Here indeed is the essence of the evangelical counsel. It is not so much in poor clothes and poor surroundings, in the absence of necessities or even comforts, but it consists in seizing the principle that all that is allowed is lent, all proprietorship having been given up. In the orders of St. Benedict and St. Francis the practice of poverty is, and is supposed to be, very different; the essence remains the same in both, namely, the absence of personal possession.

Joanna's numerous relations and friends, in and near Bassano, frequently visited her and brought

others with them. Thus it became a very common thing for her to have to see seculars; many of whom came for advice, or to recommend themselves to her prayers. Her manner was so attractive, her influence so great that she was enabled to do much good by this means. Yet, willing as she was to exercise this apostolate (of which we shall hear again later), it never became a drawback to her own interior recollectedness; she was careful so to watch her senses, as not to bring away with her needless distractions. Her sisters in religion soon found that it was useless to refer to the dress of any secular, or indeed to their appearance, Joanna had never noticed it, for "seeing the King in His beauty" what were these earthly things to her? Yet she never allowed herself to exercise this watchfulness at the expense of simplicity, there was nothing stiff or prudish in the manner of the servant of God; an exaggeration which often causes what it seeks to avoid. She made a habit of always taking some needlework to the parlour, and thus without attracting attention could keep her eyes on it and away from the vanities she did not wish to see. Sometimes, people said to her: "Mother, please attend to what I am saying," and she would answer smilingly: "But it is the heart and not the eyes that attend."

These were not the only distractions avoided by Joanna. She had a dread of worldly news or of any thoughts that could take up even a portion of that mind she wished to be filled with God alone; on

the other hand, she lost no opportunity of providing food for thoughts that would lift her near to Him. The lives of the saints, especially those of her own Order, gave her peculiar pleasure. Had they not attained what she was striving after? And had they not reached it by the same Rule as guided her? The life of St. Placidus, the dearly loved son of St. Benedict and proto-martyr of the Order, who was martyred in Sicily with his community, brothers and sister Flavia, attracted her greatly. This life which had been lent to the community, was either a manuscript or rare edition, for in one of her letters she says: "If you have not the life of St. Placidus and would wish to copy it, let me know; we have almost finished with our copy and it is most beautiful. What would it not be, if we could have the lives of all the saints of our Order!"

Her own desire of suffering attracted her to the martyrs, and we find that Saints Lawrence, Sebastian, Agnes, Catherine of Alexandria and St. Ursula and her companions all had their place in her devotions, and she read their lives with great admiration and edification. It is not unusual for holy souls to love to read of virtue seen in its accomplishment in the lives of the saints rather than in spiritual books and, "can I not do what these have done" is the question that naturally arises, and, in generous souls, is promptly answered. The works of Blossius, the gentle Abbot of Liessies were favourite spiritual reading with Joanna. No doubt she often tried to see herself in that "Mirror for

Monks" which is one of the most wonderfully compact treatises of the monastic life possible to find. The exercises of St. Ignatius were often in her hand, and a copy used by her came after her death into the possession of Abbot Robert of Bassano. It had on the first page the following inscription written in the saint's own hand: *Bassano del Monistero di S. Gieronimo a uso di D. Giovanna Maria Bonoma*. Then, as now, Rodriguez's complete and exhaustive treatise on the religious life, was valued in every community and was much appreciated by Blessed Joanna. Of it she wrote many years later. "O what a book this is, how truly religious and beautiful!" It is enough to mention these few works to have some idea of her spiritual education. Many were the saints to whom she felt devotion; St. Benedict, and his sons and daughters, it is needless to mention. Each one of them seemed to say to her heart: "Be ye imitators of me as I am of Christ." St. Aloysius, on account of his innocence and penance, had been a favourite devotion from the outset of her monastic life, and for the same reason the early martyrs and virgins claimed her affection. The saints who had lived almost in her own time were the objects of her admiration, because it seemed to bring the possibility of great sanctity more home to her. The venerable Frances Farnese was the Foundress of the nuns so well known under the title of *Sepolte vive*, the ruined walls of whose Roman home with their rude frescoes are still to be seen, although they

themselves were some years ago dispossessed of the convent where they had lived hidden with Christ in God. When the life of this wonderful servant of God was being read in the refectory at St. Jerome's it evoked great sympathy and enthusiasm in Blessed Joanna. She wrote at the time, "they are now reading it in the refectory, it is indeed very beautiful and makes us blush with shame to think that in our own times these good nuns have lived in such fervour, suffering and rigorous silence. It is clear, to our shame, that all they desired was to have their purgatory here, so that they might go straight to heaven; and how much am I ashamed, who have yet done nothing and pass my life in desires only." Joanna was patriotic too in her devotion to the saints, and had a predilection for those of her part of the country, St. Cajetan, St. Charles Borromeo, and others, but especially for the Venerable Ghelio Ghelino, the cause of whose beatification was about to be introduced. He was a noble of Vicenza and a Canon of the Cathedral, and his body reposes in the church of St. Faustinus, where she had many Votive Masses of the Blessed Trinity said in his honour.



CHAPTER V.

(1625—1633.)

Penances. Joanna as Mistress of the school.
She receives the Stigmata. The Plague.

ARISE, eat: for thou hast yet a great way to go," were the words Dame Joanna heard one morning as she lay in bed very ill and desiring to die that she might be for ever with Christ. She rose, and going to Communion was cured of her sickness, and on that great way which lay before her It was always her strength and consolation. It was the custom in her monastery for the nuns to communicate on all Sundays and on feasts of precept and devotion, and these in Italy are many even now when they have been considerably cut down. Yet, Joanna's desire exceeded these limits, and at times she felt as if she could not contain herself for the greatness of her longing to receive her Lord sacramentally. One day—it was September 2nd when this feeling nearly overpowered her, the Object of her desires appeared all glorious to her in her cell and said "My beloved spouse what dost thou wish from Me?" "Thou knowest O my Master", she replied, "that I desire nought but Thyself." Then, putting His Hand into His wounded Side, He drew out the Sacred Host tinged with Blood and gave it to her saying, "receive, My Spouse," and thus communicated her.

Very numerous are the graces recorded which were given her at her Communions. On the fourth Sunday of the Lent following her profession, our Lord appeared in great glory to her after she had received Him, and holding a standard He exclaimed "Victory, victory, already thou art Mine, let none then have part with thee," and to show she belonged to Him He signed her on the forehead with a mark that remained long after. Another time, in the year 1626, she was standing with the nuns waiting to receive Communion, when He put on her a triple necklace of gold, ornamented with diamonds, rubies, sapphires and other precious stones signifying charity. Wearing this, He told her she would be disposed for other graces in the future. As she gained or lost in the exercise of virtue, so the chain increased or decreased in beauty. Whenever the gold was in the least dimmed, she knew she had failed in charity, and only after acts of contrition did it resume its former brightness. This chain was always visible to her eyes, and sometimes to those of her sisters who were more closely united to God than others. Even during her remote preparations for Communion her heart was so full of her coming Guest the day and night preceding, that her ears were quickened to hear the melody of angel voices announcing His coming: words were uttered of high and loving import which at times even some more highly favoured amongst her sisters could hear when near her. "Purify the powers and faculties, quicken them, exercise them, submit them

to His never-failing grace and they will see things which no heart could have suspected, hear words which no imagination could have anticipated, and cling to their Heavenly Father as creatures made for Him, and Him alone.”¹

What need to relate more of these marvellous moments in Joanna’s life? Enough has been said to show her longing and her reward. The mystical pervaded her life, but it is not that which helps us, wandering on amidst difficulties and discouragements, rather let us turn our thoughts to the trials she went through and the battles she fought. The loving caresses of our Lord did not make up the whole of her life, even in these early years. Within twelve months of her profession she was assailed by the terrible trial of scrupulosity to which many servants of God have been subjected for their humiliation and purification. Added to this, melancholy and diffidence oppressed her, together with a great sense of her own sinfulness. These interior trials and the light on her own nothingness given her one morning after Communion made her cry out : “ O my Beloved, what an abyss of misery is there not in me ! ” For six months this was the burden of her prayer, and she passed three years at the feet of our Lord in most profound humility, growing in the knowledge of her insufficiency and uselessness. Her own sinfulness and Divine Justice

¹ Advent Pastoral. 1884, of Right Revnd Bishop Hedley, D.D., O.S.B.

seemed to array themselves before her so forcibly, that fears for her very salvation filled her soul. Yet these interior sufferings were not enough for this spouse of a crucified God who longed to imitate the martyrs, and to immolate her body to Him by penance as a proof of her love. She thirsted for suffering. Constant vigils, continual fastings, were not enough to satisfy her ardour. For a length of time she daily disciplined herself so severely that the floor and walls of her cell were sprinkled with her blood. Her discipline was made of iron chains garnished with points and balls, which tore and bruised her flesh. Her Abbess and confessor alone knew of the austerities which were as carefully hidden from others as was possible, and Sister Justina Baroncelli, a lay sister in whom she had great confidence, was in the habit of going in the morning to wash the cell from the stains of blood, so that others might not know her secret. One day, however, as she was kneading bread with great diligence, a sharp chain which she always wore fell to the ground, and her confusion was great that this should be seen by others. Even the little known by the nuns of her mortifications made them fear she would shorten her life by her austerities. In Lent she redoubled them, as we find from a letter to her confessor, in which she very humbly asks his permission for certain mortifications — “we are once more in the holy season of Lent,” she writes, “and I am doing nothing; I beg of you to give me permission to wear the chain three days, or

whenever you like, also to take the discipline on Monday besides the usual days — (Wednesday and Friday), and to use, not the one made of cord, but the other. In all things I commit myself to holy obedience, and pray to God for grace to do His Holy Will — *Deo Gratias.*”

During the years 1625 and 1626 Blessed Joanna was strengthened and encouraged in her life of penance by frequent apparitions of saints. The early martyrs and virgins especially responded to her own devotion, and would relate their sufferings by fire and sword. She saw in her visions the minutest details of their tortures, and longed to imitate them, knowing that those who lived and suffered for Christ, though without giving up their lives, were associated to the glory of those whom they desired to imitate. Amongst the martyrs she beheld St. Charles Borromeo, to whom she was very devout, and she understood that he was so shown to her that she might know how his holy life and merits gave him a share in the glory of the martyrs. The effect of these visions was an increase in her ardent love for God and longing for Him alone.

Joanna's desire of suffering was gratified, not only by the interior trials, and sickness which were often her lot, by self-imposed penances and the rigour of her Rule, but in a way still harder to bear. The extraordinary graces bestowed on her, came to be known outside the monastery. For some time her state had been concealed even from its inmates, but as the supernatural took more and more pos-

session of her, it could not be hidden; this was a great trial and humiliation. Such things were not looked on then, any more than now, with unmixed feelings, and distrust perhaps predominated. John Bonomo wrote to the confessor of the monastery in the beginning of 1628, telling him that the way by which his daughter was being led, was getting known in Vicenza. This indeed caused no small displeasure to everyone; Joanna herself and many others offered earnest prayers to God that these things might be hidden, and Masses, fasts and disciplines were offered up to obtain this grace. In answer to her father the confessor could only say: "All this is truly wonderful, and I know not how it will end; she has been tried in various ways to prove the reality of these things, and prayer is continually made in the monastery for the same intention; she is very humble, obedient and diffident, and shrinks from these external signs."

Her likeness to her Crucified Spouse was to be the nearest possible. Her body was to be marked with the prints of the nails that fastened Him to the Cross; with St. Paul she was to be able to say with literal truth: "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus Christ." On the vigil of the feast of St. Matthew, 1630, our Lord appeared to her during a trance and said: "My beloved spouse, it is not fitting that the Bride should differ from the Bridegroom, and therefore I will adorn thee with Mine own livery; behold Mine open Side, which lovingly invites thee to enter." A great

light revealed His Heart to her, and it seemed to bear the impression of the Holy Cross; then He added: "This sign is so pleasing to Me, that I have it engraved on My Heart, and I desire that it should also be engraved on thine after thou hast passed through other trials and sufferings to which I summon thee as My Spouse." Our Lord then left her with her heart full of sentiments of resignation and of a loving willingness to correspond to His choice of her, and she continued to occupy herself with the constant thought of the Passion, and suffered in one way or another as He had foretold her.

On the 6th February of the following year she was carried out of herself in a trance that lasted a considerable time, and during it was given an understanding of many things concerning the life of our Lord. On the Thursday after, she heard Him saying to her: "Behold we go up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man shall be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes, and they shall condemn Him to death, and shall deliver Him to the gentiles to be mocked, and scourged, and crucified." He then made an offering in her name to the Eternal Father, protesting that she did not serve Him for the sweetness she might experience, or for her own sake. Shewing Himself to her in His glory, He told her how much He had suffered in His Passion, and went into every detail of those hours. After strengthening her to go further still, He led her through each suffering, making her partake of it, beginning with the parting from His Holy

Mother, and ending with the Agony in the garden and His capture by the soldiers. The violence used on Him at this moment was reproduced on her, and shewed itself in livid swellings, and this continued for three years from Thursday at midday until Friday evening, or, now and then, until Saturday at the same hour. On these occasions she was sometimes motionless and rigid; occasionally she could speak a few words, and would discourse on every point in this sacred drama, and those near could hear her colloquies with God and could see that she suffered beyond expression. It was also noticed that at such times she very often knew what was going on in other places. At the beginning of her ecstasy she used to lie on the ground where she had been, as it were, thrown by the brightness of the light she received; her feet as well as her hands were crossed one over the other, and she held a crucifix in two fingers of the left hand with such strength that no one could force it from her. In this position she remained the whole time of her trance, unless commanded by obedience to put herself on her bed. When it was over, it seemed as though she had come from another world. The effect of these wonderful hours was a burning desire for suffering and humiliation, as well as great light and understanding about spiritual things.

The culminating point in a series of these marvels was reached on a Friday evening in 1632, when our Lord shewed her His Sacred Wounds most vividly,

and lovingly prepared her to bear their likeness in her own body. Suddenly those around saw her rise from the ground, her arms stretched out, her feet crossed and her eyes partly closed. Five rays coming from the five Wounds of our Saviour wounded her in the side, hands and feet; the pain on the left side was, both then and afterwards, much more acute than on the right. Her hands were marked with large red marks, and on Fridays were black and swollen, and appeared to drop blood. The place of the nails could always be seen, and some persons even perceived the rays. These outward signs remained for many years, and after the long trances had discontinued, blood and water came from her side, but nothing was done to heal the wound; the only treatment she used was the application of folded cloths.

Joanna was at this time mistress of the school, and a little pupil, who probably needed more care than the rest, slept in her cell. One night she awoke and saw her mistress arising from bed as usual to pray; in the darkness of the night the child saw rays proceeding from the wounds in Joanna's hands. This child afterwards became a nun and then Abbess in the monastery, but at that time she was only five years old; her name was Pellegrina Costa. Others, too, saw these luminous rays, and it was only after earnest and tearful prayer that the servant of God obtained that the wounds should heal, and even then evident traces remained. The nuns and others used to ask what

was the matter with her hands, and on march 14th 1633, she writes to her confessor that she had called them chilblains, but that the answer she got was that such chilblains had never been seen before; and in her confusion she insisted on this version of the case. She then goes on to say that she turned to God and begged Him with many tears to hide these signs of His love, and during an ecstasy He had, much to her content, granted her request. Her trances continued, however, with great frequency, and she wondered if she should cease to give herself up to prayer; this she was willing to do if there was any fear of deception, but she adds: "It seems impossible for me to live without the Soul of my soul, I may say it is not I who live, but another, One who has full possession of my soul as absolute Master." Here we are reminded of that great servant of God M. Olier, the founder of St. Sulpice. "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me." "In M. Olier, these words were literally fulfilled. His soul, nay his very body, became the sensible habitation and organ of Jesus Christ moving in him, so that he no longer spoke or acted as of himself, but only with the concurrence and by the disposal of Him who lived within him." M. Tronson thus writes, "The Spirit of our Lord rendered itself such absolute Master of his heart and took such complete possession of his soul and all his faculties, that It no longer permitted him the slightest movement, save in dependence on Itself and with Its concurrence. It showed Itself in his very eyes, his tongue,

his hands, making him act, or preventing him from acting according to Its pleasure. The spirit of Jesus was the Soul of his soul, and the informing, animating principle of his whole life.”¹

The wounds in Joanna’s hands and feet had remained open only a year, but that in her side never closed. She wished to hide the secret of the King and He had helped her to do so, but as that fifth mark of His love was unseen, it had remained to attest her likeness to Him. Her cousins Dames Angelica Guadagnini and Mary Bonomo, as well as Dame Francesca Belli, were in her confidence, but though they earnestly desired to see this wound, she would never permit it, and only on the linen taken from her side they saw the stains of blood and water.

Though the marks of the Stigmata were thus either healed or hidden from others, her ecstasies were noted and commented upon. As much as her community duties allowed she remained in her cell so as to be free from observation, but once curiosity was aroused secrecy became impossible. For example, some of the nuns resolved one day to see what she was doing during her absence from them. They found her on her knees, rapt out of herself, and could by no means recall her to a sense of what was going on around. Soon these trances were not confined to her cell. In any place she was likely to be seized on by the Spirit of God,

¹ From *The Life of M. Olier* by HEALY THOMPSON.

and at such times her breathing and the beating of her heart seemed to cease, her eyes were half open, and the heat of her body was so great that those who touched her were affected by it. The crucifix she held was so tightly clenched that no power could take it from her. These things appeared so marvellous that experiments were often made to see if she was indeed without feeling; lighted candles were held to her hands, needles put under her nails, without eliciting the least sign of life from the servant of God. In a violent attempt to wrench the crucifix from her one day, one of her fingers was dislocated, and she afterwards suffered much pain from it. This put an end to any more experiments, and a lay-sister, Susanna Fortino, was appointed to wait on and assist her.

John Bonomo was very much attached to his daughter, and about the time she received the Stigmata he left Assiagio and went to live at Vicenza together with his wife and little daughter Margaret, at a house called *al Carmine*. His love for his eldest child had frequently shewn itself in letters, in visits when possible, and in constant gifts such as he thought would be most useful, and which were a god-send to the sick and poor. For, as has been already remarked, the infirmary benefited by the vegetables, fruit and flowers, and the many other good things sent to Dame Joanna. The poor also profited, as besides her dowry, John Bonomo gave her an annuity of fifty ducats, to which the condition was added, at Joanna's sug-

gestion, that it should be used in charity. Many a poor person owed a start in life, or help when it was most needed, to this charitable father and daughter, the latter of whom used to say she would willingly give herself to help them in their needs.

Troubles, doubtless of his own making, followed Bonomo through his life. A family of good position at Assiago named Dell' Oglgio had pursued him with enmity and hatred for five and twenty years, probably in consequence of some early affront laid on them by him : a lawsuit also had embittered family relations, but all seemed settled before his departure from Assiago at the end of the year 1632. The two preceding years had been of great trial to his native town, and as his family behaved nobly during the time, it will be no unfitting digression to give a short account of what occurred.

In March, 1630, the plague, which had been raging in many cities of Italy, attacked Assiago. The inhabitants were seized by terror, and the parish priest — to his shame be it recorded — fled to his native place, Sandrigo. Happily there was in the afflicted town a doctor whose skill equalled his kind-heartedness, Martin Bonomo, cousin to John. His first care was to find a parish priest willing to sacrifice himself for his flock. He was well acquainted with the Arch-priest of Marostica, a native of Assiago, whose name was Guiseppe Viero, and to him he wrote in the name of the municipality, urging him to come to the assistance

of his abandoned countrymen. No sooner had this devoted priest received the letter than he hurried to Padua, where he resigned his office into the hands of Cardinal Cornaro, and receiving his consent and blessing started for Assiagio. He was welcomed, not by the sound of bells and the acclamations of the people, but by the silence and tears of the authorities and of his noble friend Martin Bonomo. As he passed through the city he beheld deserted streets; men, women and children whose faces he knew well in spite of their lividness and expression of deep misery, looked at him from the windows of their houses. He arrived at the beginning of April and remained until the plague had left the ill-fated city to which he had been an angel of comfort. From one house to another, from the bed of the sick to that of the dying, he went continually; there was no rest, no respite for him, because there was none in the fearful ravages of the plague. The dying gave directions about their wills from the windows of the rooms where they lay, and the notaries sat in the piazzas or the streets and wrote at their dictation; hospitals were hastily improvised and left empty in a few hours by the countless increase of deaths; the number of cemeteries grew and the dread reaper, death, seemed never to tire of using his sickle. Between April and the middle of July the number of deaths registered in that small population was 892. After that, all registration ceased and was not resumed until November of

the same year, for the ravages of the fell disease during the summer and autumn were too great to be individually noted. Amongst those who were cut down was John Martin Bonomo, (an elder brother of the physician already mentioned) a doctor who had exerted his art to the uttermost for the relief of the suffering people; with him died his two little sons and their housekeeper, and it was remarked that the plague after this extended its ravages beyond Assiago, as if no one had power over it. John Bonomo, however, was not behind his relatives during all this trying time, and in the communal registers honourable mention is made of his labours: neither personal service nor alms to the poor and sick were wanting, and his charity was enhanced by the retiring modesty that did not let his left hand know what his right hand did. It was after this noviceship to a more perfect life that he went to live at Vicenza, and shortly after joined the Private Oratory of St. Jerome in that city,

CHAPTER VI.

(1632 — 1640)

Mystical Bridal. Gift of prophecy.

Love of the Liturgy.



JOANNA, as her old biographers put it, had passed through the purgative and illuminative, and had entered on the unitive way, or, as she herself expressed it, had bewailed her nothingness and sinfulness at her Lord's feet, had received graces and

lights unthought of whilst leaning on His Sacred Heart, and with the Spouse in the Canticle had been kissed by Him with the kiss of His mouth. The marks of the Passion had been impressed on her virginal body, and now she was to be admitted to that mystical Bridal of which we read in the lives of other saints. It took place during a long ecstasy. Twelve prophets of the Old Law who had been favoured with inner light regarding our Lord's Passion; twelve soldier-martyrs; twelve of the choir of virgins and martyrs; twelve virgins, who, though they had dedicated themselves to God, had not been privileged to shed their blood for Him; and twelve Founders of Religious Orders, pre-eminent amongst whom was her own glorious Father, formed the cortege which conducted Joanna to her spiritual Espousals, our Lady herself closing the procession. The heavenly Bridegroom was surrounded by twelve angels, who sang a symphony so sweet, that Joanna thought herself disengaged from this world and already the inhabitant of Heaven; then the lyres with which they accompanied the song ceased, and amidst the silence our Lord approached her and said: *Sponsabo te mihi in fide*, and put a ring of purest gold, on which was engraved the words *Tu mihi et Ego tibi*, on the third finger of her right hand. The saints in exultation sweetly sang the hymn *Jesu Corona Virginum*. When it was ended, the Bridegroom gave the Bride five Rules of love and great perfection, which she was to observe; He then left

her in a state of pure contemplation with all the powers of her soul rapt in Him, and the vision disappeared.

As was always the case after these heavenly favours, Joanna returned with love and desire of imitation to the thought of the Passion. Her first care was to write out the Rules of Perfection just given her, and after her death they were found in her Breviary. They are as follows :

“ Si diligis me, serva mandata mea.

In all thy thoughts fix thine eyes upon Me thy God and Saviour.

Follow thine own judgment in nothing, unless thou has first sought light from Me.

Thou must not henceforth have a thought of thyself. I am He that will have care of thee now and always, and do thou ever let thy thoughts dwell upon Me, for I will ever think of thee.

Before thou dost converse with anyone have recourse to Me. Beg Me to speak by thy month, and to give thee grace never to say a word which is not according to My will. Offer every action to Me before performing it, together with thy whole self, and beg for grace and help to do nothing except for Me.

I am thy God and Saviour whom thou must seek to please in all things. Therefore I do not will that thou shouldst think, speak or do anything soever without My good pleasure. I promise thee that thou shalt always have light to know what I would have thee do.

Never forget the numberless graces that I have given thee, and above all the great love I bear thee.

Render unceasingly thy loving thanks for them, and recognise thine own unworthiness to receive these My gifts.

Thou art worthy rather of punishment, yet this thought should be tempered with the hope that thou shouldst have in Me, for thou art My daughter and My spouse.

Neither appreciate nor fill thy memory with anything outside Me, and aspire continually to that union that I would fain have with thee in this world and in the next.

In the meanwhile I would charge thee to work well, yet without undue fatigue, and to bear every ill for the love of Me. Offer up My Precious Blood for the sins of the living and for the souls in Purgatory. Fear not that I shall ever abandon Thee for thou art entirely Mine — “*Tu mihi et ego tibi.*”

At the end of this writing Joanna adds the following words.

Annulo suo subarrhavit me, Dominus Jesus Christus, et tamquam sponsam decoravit me corona.

The greater the graces bestowed upon Joanna by her Divine Spouse the greater were her sufferings.

She was always in fear of being deceived, and would willingly have been led by less extraordinary ways.

Many of those around her disbelieved in the reality of her graces, and feared that if an official

enquiry should be made, the result would do harm to the monastery.

All this was very different from the encouragement so often believed to be given to those who are the recipients of unusual favours. This opposition is accentuated when the soul so favoured is one of a community.

A loving Spouse is the Beloved to the soul thus singled out, but He is a bleeding Spouse, and His Blood is poured out on those around, as well as on the soul called to a nearer likeness to the Crucified.

Dame Joanna had nevertheless one earthly protection which was a great comfort to her. The Abbess of the Monastery at this time, 1635, was Dame Gabriella Malipiero, a woman of much prudence as well as gentleness, and who was very favourably inclined towards the servant of God.

On February 8th she wrote to John Bonomo who, as we have seen, had long before learnt his daughter's state, to beg his prayers that she might persevere in the Divine Service after which she was striving with great earnestness. Already she tells him how happy he may count himself to be the father of such a true and real spouse of Christ; that she is favoured by God as neither her cousins Dames Mary and Angelica, nor any others are; she ends by warning him not to speak of her letter to Joanna, whose humility would be offended, and by telling him that he would be surprised did he know what God was doing in her. This letter also shows

us that no endeavour was spared to conceal the ecstasies of Joanna from others, and even as much as possible from the community, half of which did not know all that was going on amongst them; many of those who did were suspicious and distrustful, and as this feeling increased, the Abbess wrote to Bonomo to come to Bassano to consult with the confessor on what had better be done.

How changed must not this man have become from what he was some twenty years before, when, in spiritual things of such moment and delicacy, he could be thus trusted and depended on. His character was strong for good or evil and good had won the victory. She begs him to leave every other duty and to hurry to the monastery, where he would find "more meritorious work than going on his knees up the *Scala Santa*." His daughter was in continual ecstasy, the whole monastery were witnesses of it, and there was a fear that she might even die unless God reserved her for greater favours. The Abbess' great terror was that Joanna might be handed over to the Inquisition, and this would risk, besides much else, her becoming the laughing stock of the people, for all secrecy would then be at an end. The confessor of the monastery was a good and learned secular priest, Don Michael Simeon del Monte, of experience, charity and humility. His first care at this junction of affairs, was to consult with Monsignor Zerbino Lugo who was Bishop *in partibus* and Administrator of the diocese of Feltre, of which he became titular a few

years later. The advice he gave was "to let things mature" and to wait for the coming of the Archbishop. This decision was made known to Bonomo in a letter dated 22nd February, so it would seem that, notwithstanding the pressing letter he had received, he had not been able to go to Bassano. Joanna wrote to her father in March, but her letter has no reference to the discussion about herself of which she was possibly unaware; it was in answer to one from him in which he asks her counsel about his own spiritual life, and speaks of his troubles with his nephew Leonard; and is a proof of her humility and prudence in counsel, as well as tact in trying to reconcile the uncle and nephew.

The first example we are given of Joanna's gift of prophecy since her profession, occurred in this year. Dame Francesca Belli who had been her companion in the noviceship and who was a religious of great virtue, recommended her sister, Laura Costa, who was about to be confined, to her prayers. Joanna's reply was: "She will not die," a little after she added, "She will give birth to a son," there was a pause and then she said, "He will become a Capuchin and a great preacher." All came to pass as she had predicted, and the boy having lead a dissipated life for fifteen years, at last became a friar, under the name of Brother Philip Mary of Bassano.

It has been already said that John Bonomo after taking up his residence in Vicenza, joined the Oratory of St. Jerome. This Oratory was perhaps

unique in all Italy, but it was soon the model of many others that arose in the country. Its members were gentlemen living in their own houses, who gave themselves up to exercises of piety, especially mortification; twelve of them were elected each week to go about the city to visit the sick, to ask alms from the rich, to help the poor and to exhort all to frequent the sacraments; they tried to alleviate every misery, and no care or suffering was left unsoothed by the members of the Oratory. With such a reputation as they soon made, it is no wonder that even religious houses were anxious to have one of those unions of prayers with them so common in the Church. The Benedictine nuns had themselves inscribed at the end of 1635 in this pious sodality, in order to be partakers in the good works and prayers of its members and Blessed Joanna was not behind others in praying for the Brothers in general and her own father in particular; to him she wrote: "All the Revnd Mothers and Dames here, as well as all in the house salute you, and thank you most earnestly for having associated them to your Oratory, and you may be sure of their prayers." Indeed, Masses were daily offered up for this intention, and Joanna herself prayed most earnestly to the Blessed Trinity, to our Crucified Lord, to our Lady, St. Benedict, St. Philip Neri and St. Teresa for blessings on this most necessary work, and her father's gratitude was her best earthly reward.

Joanna's letters deserve to be printed by them-

selves for they are both characteristic and spiritual; very often they are treatises on one point or other of the spiritual life, but it would be too much of a digression from her history to quote them at any length, unless they refer to her biography, or bring out some question at issue. In one, dated Nov. 6th 1635, she refers to being cook. This office may have been given to her as a trial of her humility, but, if so, it was one which helped her to a nearer union with Him, who came not to be ministered to, but to minister, and to a greater knowledge of her own nothingness. She wonders that those earthly angels (her sisters in religion) can bear with her, and begs her father's prayers, that she may obtain mercy from God by means of two Masses to be said at the *Carmine* in honour of St. Teresa.

A very wonderful event took place on the feast of our Lady of Mount Carmel in the following year. About midday a terrible storm broke over the city and surrounding country. The drenching rain, wind, thunder and lightning were so great, that they seemed to presage the end of the world, and the community retired to the choir to pray, for great was the fear of some terrible catastrophe. Sister Susanna Fortimo was crossing a portion of the monastery near the garden, for the purpose of entering the choir, when she was struck by a flash of lightning and fell to the ground; the nuns flew to her assistance and endeavoured to raise her; they hoped she was only insensible and used every means to restore consciousness, but soon found that she was

indeed dead and all their care was in vain. Joanna, more moved than the others as she thought of the services rendered her by this faithful lay-sister, fell on her knees, prayed in silence for a while, then rising, she approached the corpse, and made the sign of the cross with her thumb on the mouth of the deceased, who immediately rose, spoke and walked. Sister Susanna was very good and simple, she found no difficulty in speaking of her experiences between the time she had died and come to life again. She told the community she had been in a dark cave where she was to make her purgatory, and she complained much to Joanna, that after having been certain of her salvation, she should have been brought back to this world of uncertainty. "But," answered Joanna, "what have I to do with it? It is God's will that you should outlive me"; and so she did, and had the greatest devotion towards her who had brought her back to life.

This same sister had been to confession one day, and afterwards felt uneasy about part of her accusation, then, doubting what she should do, said within herself, "I shall go to Dame Joanna who is in ecstasy in her cell, and if, when she sees me, she makes the sign of the Cross on my forehead, mouth and breast, I shall take it as a sign that I have made a good confession; if she does not, I shall know it was not complete." She accordingly went to the cell of the servant of God, who, as soon as she saw her, made

the three signs as Sister Susanna had hoped, and so the simple faith of the lay-sister was rewarded. The lay sisters seemed to have been specially beloved by Joanna, if we may judge by these and other marks of her interest. There was one called Agnes, a native of Trent, whose mother, also named Agnes, had lately died. Her daughter longingly desired to know the state of her mother's soul, and felt sure that Dame Joanna could inform her. She went to her cell and before she had time to make known her request heard her cry out in ecstasy, "O Agnes, Mistress Agnes, how happy you are; what glory is yours, O blessed soul!" In a transport of joy Sister Agnes left the cell. Without preferring her request it had been granted, and her heart was too full for silence; she imparted her happy news to every nun she met, and told how wonderfully their saintly companion had understood her unspoken desire.

A letter written during this year, on the eve of the fifteenth anniversary of her profession, shows us how happy Blessed Joanna was in her vocation. The letter is to her father, and she says: "To-day is the vigil of the Nativity of the most holy Mother of God, a day of great importance to all, but how much more so to me, miserable that I am, since that day saw me admitted into this holy place, this heaven on earth, and professed in it. O how often do I think that I came to suffer for the love of Christ, and I find that I am in a Paradise, because I am unworthy to suffer." And yet we

know her life was not one of earthly joy; we have seen enough to show us how greatly she was tried within and without, but it all seemed as nothing for the greatness of her love, a love which fostered her devotion to the Mother who stood at the foot of the Cross.

As a child she had loved and had recourse to our Lady in all her troubles and difficulties, and as she grew older this devotion increased. A little Oratory in the Cloister was her special care, and her delight was to adorn it with fresh flowers, especially during the month of May; thither she would take the pupils of the school in the evening, when she was their mistress, and would get the nuns to sing the Litany there. Every Saturday she fasted in her honour, and recited the Rosary and little Office in addition to her choir duties. Not one of her feasts went by without new signs of love and devotedness. This was the more easy from that appreciation of the Liturgy which made her enter deeply into every day of the Church's Office, and those dedicated to the Mother of God seemed to have had a special preference. We find her writing about them with a childlike love of expectancy whenever they were near. Places consecrated to her honour for any reason were especially dear to her, and we are not surprised to find that the Sanctuary of the Madonna da Monte claimed her particular love, as it was situated on Monte Berico, where she was said to have appeared, and a church was built under the above designation

by the people of Vicenza. Joanna loved the Assumption more than any other of her Lady's feasts, and it was also the principal festival of the Madonna da Monte, so she used annually to send a certain Tarsia as her delegate to make a pilgrimage to the shrine. Maddalena, a servant of her father was made the substitute if Tarsia could not go, and in this manner our Lady was honoured by the Bonomo family, and many were the graces obtained.

Prayers and hymns were composed by this devoted child of Mary in honour of her Mother, some in latin, others in italian. The following prayer was composed whilst in ecstasy, and written out when she came to herself. It was preserved by Sister Catherine Miozzi with other memorials, and is therefore believed to have been written while the Saint was Mistress of Novices : " I rejoice, and shall rejoice eternally, O great Mother of God, O my dear Mistress and most sweet Mother, my most faithful advocate and Queen of heaven and earth, at your great dignity of Mother of God and at the pre-eminence which you, after God Himself, have over every creature. I rejoice, and shall rejoice eternally, for the great glory and happiness you enjoy; and were it possible that I were you, O my most holy Mother, and you were me, I would, for the love I bear you, and because you alone are worthy, I would wish, I say with all affection, that you might be what you are, and I what I am by your grace — your unworthy servant and child.

Thus I long with all my heart to be made worthy to serve you as a slave, and to love you as a daughter. To you, to you, O Mary, I give all myself, just as I am. Ah, do not refuse me, but accept me as entirely your own. Teach me yourself, holy humility, obedience and purity, with all the other virtues, that thus I may become worthy to serve you in this life, and then to rejoice with you together with all the Saints, in the next. Amen."

CHAPTER VII.

(1640 — 1642)

Her ecstasies. Foreknowledge of future events. Vision of St. Cajetan. Letters to her confessor.



BLESSED Joanna's desire was to be unknown, uncared for, calumniated; in two words to be humbled and to suffer, and instead of this she was sought after and honoured. The great things God had done and was doing in her, had been more and more noised abroad, and distrust was exchanged for popularity. Bassano, Trent, Vicenza, Padua and even Venice heard of the holy nun who received such continued graces and favours from God. Her name was in the mouths of clergy and laity, who went to see her in such numbers that the visits increased from day to day. Her counsel was requested in difficulties, her

prayers asked to obtain graces. No humiliation could have been greater to Joanna; she shrank from notice, and only wished to hide the "secret of the King." Not indeed, that she underrated His favours, for, had she lived away from men a solitary in the wilderness, her happiness in their possession would have been unalloyed. But, as things were, she found herself a centre of attraction. Her quiet, hidden life seemed gone, her very duties were interrupted, for her ecstasies on Fridays and sometimes on other days also prevented her presence in Choir. Many were the prayers said and tears shed, as she knelt in her cell and favourite place in the choir, that God would take away those outward signs of His love.

Two years passed away, and at the end she was heard in part, for her ecstasies became less frequent, lasted a shorter time and took place mostly during the night, so that she gained, both by being unobserved and able to attend to her community duties. In two letters written in the month of March, one to her confessor, the other to her father, she communicated this good news with many expressions of thankfulness. She adds: "I adore and pray, and give myself to that God who has created and redeemed me, and conferred other innumerable benefits upon me. O most powerful Father Benedict have pity on me and for the love of God help me, as you are well able. Surely God in His goodness will help me, although I do nothing except sin, yet through His mercy, good

desires are not wanting, but, 'nothing does nothing.'"

It was sometime during this year that Joanna gave a singular proof of her knowledge of future events. One of the community, named Julia, was very ill, and had received the last sacraments, but no anxiety was felt as to her death being near; symptoms however suddenly came on, which left no doubt that the end was at hand, and the priest was instantly sent for. Joanna was in ecstasy and knew nothing of the turn things had taken, but she began to cry out: "Help her, O Lord, for your Christ — the priest — will not come in time," and so indeed it happened, for when he arrived at her bedside she was already dead.

The confessor of the monastery at this time was Don Alvisè Salvioni, a good and enlightened Priest; his early years had been spent in Rome, and he had had the inestimable advantage of ecclesiastical education at the fountain head. His talents would have given him a position there which many would have sought, but Don Alvisè looked for nothing of this kind, his one wish was to become a spiritual man and to work fruitfully for souls, and so he went to Bassano, where, besides preaching and hearing confessions, he performed the office of schoolmaster. So dear were his humble labours to this holy priest, that he refused to become the co-adjutor of his cousin the Bishop of Feltre, who even wished to resign in his favour.

When he first began to hear the confessions of

the community, Joanna was nearing the end of those public ecstasies she dreaded so much, and the prudent confessor left no means untried to discover by what spirit she was led. On a certain Saturday, as he was confessing the nuns one after another, according to their rank in the community, he perceived that Joanna did not present herself in her turn. On asking for her, he was told that she was still in ecstasy. "Go," said he, "and tell her to come under obedience to make her confession immediately." No sooner had Joanna heard the command, than she prepared to obey, and went downstairs without touching the ground with her feet, and was in the confessional in a moment making her confession. When it was over she returned to her cell and again fell into ecstasy. Harder trials than this were imposed on her, and once she was commanded to put an old basket on her head and jump about the monastery crying out, "Look at the fool;" another day, to go about with a cord round her neck, and at the hour when the nuns were going into the refectory for dinner, to kneel at the door and beg their prayers, accusing herself of being a great sinner. The servant of God longed to imitate her Lord humbled in His Passion, clothed in a white robe, mocked by Herod's soldiers, and so she obeyed not only exactly, but joyfully.

At Easter 1640 she wrote to her father: "I ought already to be dead to myself, and to have crucified this self-love that brings so much harm to the soul, and is so subtle and treacherous that it repeatedly

deceives one and prevents true perfection. O my God I am not worthy to obtain this grace, although I have desired and prayed for it all through Lent; but alas — ‘nothing does nothing.’”

Doubts however about her state again became rife. Many disbelieved in her and thought she laboured under a delusion, and this evil opinion was in itself another grace to Joanna, and one which she would have embraced very joyfully and peacefully were it not that it accentuated her own fear of being deceived. Those who saw her did not guess at the mental troubles, the perturbation of soul that she suffered; they imagined her life one of constant sweetness and inner joy. Perhaps, had they realised what they were doing, these good people would have been less clamorous.

About this time she wrote to Father George of Venice, a Capuchin in whom she had great confidence, and who was not improbably extraordinary confessor to the Monastery: “O through what does not a soul pass in this life; what fears, anguishes, afflictions, what contradictions from both within and without!” The trials she underwent through her own doubts and those of others were hard to bear, but another was added to them. The enemy of souls was allowed to try the servant of God; he showed himself to her in frightful forms, menacing her with great insolence, and causing her much bodily pain by his violence, and much mental suffering by the hideous and repulsive appearances he assumed. Her Angel Guardian

used to encourage her at such times and say to her : " Fear not for he can do thee no harm." When we consider that these great interior troubles and these assaults of the evil one lasted for ten or eleven years, we may have some idea of the fire of purification through which her soul passed. But God did not leave her un comforted, and a vision with which she was favoured about this time filled her with consolation. She relates it in the third person as follows :

" Being in the midst of one of those trials, and thinking that both on account of corporal infirmity and mental fears she might not live long, Our Lord appeared, surrounded by great light, and consoled her, saying : *noli timere*. She immediately saw herself on a great sea, in a beautiful little boat made of strong solid wood, all of one piece and without joinings. Three beautiful young maidens dressed respectively in white, green and red, occupied it. ' See,' said our Lord, ' if thou hast any reason for fear, and that thou mayest not lose heart for the future, behold through what thou hast already passed.' Immediately she saw a little way off the fiercest storm raging, great darkness, and waves which seeming to rise to heaven, black and heavy, filled her soul with fear. Then our Lord said : ' Thou hast passed through all this tempest by My help, and having seen what thou hast gone through, wilt thou fear now when I shall be always with thee?' The boat symbolized resignation to the Will of God, by which the soul arrives securely at the haven of safety, and by Divine grace passes

through all tempests and tribulations. And truly the temptations, fears and other sufferings, external and internal, through which this soul, of which I speak, passed were great. The three maidens with beautiful wings signified faith, hope and charity. Then, without telling her how long she was to be on this sea, our Lord showed her a lovely and smiling valley, carpeted with flowers; a path at the foot of a mountain covered with pebbles of every kind and colour, white, red, blue, green and grey, so roughly strewn as to be felt by those walking over them; while hedges of rose-trees with their flowers and thorns bounded either side. On the summit of the mountain, where the road ended, there was a beautiful plain stretching further than the eye could reach, where all kinds of sweet flowers and delicious fruits grew. At the beginning of the valley was written in large letters of gold, *Vallis pinguedinis et humilitatis*. On the road these words, *Hæc est via quæ ducit ad vitam* were formed by the many coloured stones, and the sentence *Janque felici residens Olympo*¹ was inscribed on the plain. The soul being wonderfully enlightened by this vision, understood clearly the meaning of what she saw. The fertile plain was the state of perfect contemplation and union of the soul with God; the road, the path of virtue, in the treading of which many difficulties are encountered; the thorns signified sorrows yet to be endured; whilst the

¹ These words are from the hymn *Laudibus cives* sung at Vespers on the feast of St. Benedict.

roses were the promise of many spiritual consolations."

The thorny path had indeed to be trodden, and the fierce storms to be endured, by one who tried to emulate the shining purity of the angels in heaven; one who strove to transfer to her soul the likeness of the Queen of virgins, and who endeavoured to follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. Joanna constantly prayed for the fulness of this grace, and one day whilst asking for it with unusual fervour, as she knelt before an image of our Lady in her cell, she was carried out of herself and fell into an ecstasy. Remaining immoveable, and lifted from the ground, she could only ejaculate the words Purity, Purity.

Sister Francesca Bella, who has been mentioned as very devoted to the saint, was passing by, and entering saw her in this state, repeating the same word. As she stood watching, Joanna, coming to herself, turned round, and seeing her said, "What are you doing here instead of going to bed and sleeping?" Francesca replied: "I am not going unless you first tell me what you have seen, and the graces you have received whilst saying that word;" her determination was unalterable, and at last the servant of God told her, under inviolable secrecy, that our Lady had appeared to her, and covered her from head to foot with a white veil in sign of the purity, which, in answer to her prayer, had been, by a singular privilege, just bestowed upon her. If before this time she had been free from the

slightest temptation against purity, she never after this had even so much as a thought against it.

The secret was faithfully kept until after Joanna's death, when it was revealed, and the incident was the subject of a picture hung up, according to custom, in St. Peter's for public veneration during the ceremony of her beatification, and of another painting put over the Altar dedicated to her at St. Jerome's.

About the same time as she received this grace, she had a vision which consoled her greatly, as it manifested the glory of a saint especially dear to her. This was St. Cajetan, whose beatification had taken place in 1629, but whose canonization in 1671 she did not live to see.

One day after Communion, when she was pouring forth protestations of her desire to love and suffer for Him, in Whose Presence she felt as if annihilated, she bethought her of recommending herself to St. Andrew Avellino, who had been a member of the Order founded by St. Cajetan. Whilst so engaged, she was rapt out of herself and beheld, in spirit, a limpid fountain, from which flowed rivulets, which dividing and spreading filled the whole world. Then appeared to her in great glory St. Cajetan, seated on a throne covered with purple and set with jewels; he was clothed in white, girt with a broad band of gold, a crown on his head, and a palm in his hand which he appeared to be in the act of giving away. Many angels burning with divine love, who she thought were

seraphim, surrounded him, as well as saintly souls who had striven to copy the virtues of St. Andrew. Joanna seemed herself to be in paradise, freed from all the things of earth, and even from herself. Then St. Cajetan said to her lovingly: "See my daughter how much is gained by despising oneself and contemning earthly things!" By these words she understood that he was raised thus high, because in this world he had been humbled. The throne so royally adorned was the reward of the weariness he endured, and the zeal he exercised in saving souls; the pure white garment of his chastity; the golden girdle his love of God and constancy in adversity; the palm was emblematic of his great patience, and the crown signified the victory he had gained over the world, himself and the devil. A diamond pendant on his breast bore the words *Fides, Spes, Caritas*, written in gold, and this was given him because on these virtues he had laid the foundation of his Institute. The riches that, for the love of God, he had trodden under foot in this world, now added to his glory. He thanked Joanna for the zeal which she had manifested and the prayers she had said for his Institute and told her that he always regarded her as a daughter. He then spoke to her about his religious, saying that he was very satisfied with them in general, but that a few in some places were not so fervent as he wished, and then he added: "My daughter, know that the abundance of earthly goods deprives the soul of heavenly

riches, and impoverishes her in virtue." These words made such an impression on Joanna, that she wished to be able to repeat them to all those religious with whom the holy founder was not pleased, and who were not, especially some Superiors, careful about the exact observance of poverty.

A remarkable instance of Joanna's gift of prophecy occurred about the time of which we are now writing.

There was a young Franciscan, not long professed, amongst the students under the care of Father Thomas da Feltre, named Brother Paul. One day the master received the congratulations of the servant of God, on his having a future martyr, this same Brother Paul, under his care. He was a youth of great promise, who, born at Mantua in 1611, had, at the age of eighteen, entered amongst the Oblates of St. Ambrose, where he was made Prior six years later, his fitness for the office weighing against his extreme youth. But a strong desire grew up in the young man's heart to go to foreign missions. It seemed unlikely that he could carry this wish into effect whilst with the Oblates, and after much prayer he decided on asking admission among the reformed Franciscans, who had many missions in the East. He received their habit and made his profession. Joanna's prophecy came to his ears and thus added fuel to the flame. In due time he set out for the missions, having previously asked her counsel and prayers. The history of his holy life and martyrdom will be more fully related in

writing of the year in which he gave up his life for God.

Don Alvise, of whom mention has been already made, now fell very ill, and we can imagine how Joanna's sufferings must have been aggravated by the absence of her spiritual father, and the thought of losing one, who had led her so wisely along the thorny road through which she had to pass; for Joanna had no delusion on the subject. She knew that her spiritual father was soon to pass through the valley of the shadow of death, and bravely she tried to face the prospect of parting, and to help him who had never failed her. Letters which she wrote to him have been preserved, and one is as follows: —

"You write and speak freely of going into that country you so long to see. Great is the grace, surely, given you by our Lord, first, in letting you suffer so much, and secondly, in giving you help and time to settle everything, before the end, in great resignation and peace of soul. Blessed be God; we must necessarily resign ourselves to everything, give up everything, for He disposes all things well, and we are ignorant of what the future may bring. God's secrets are hidden, but He does all things well and with infinite love, so that we can only say, *Fiat voluntas tua in æternum*. Pray to God for me, your poor child, and if you indeed go to paradise, [literally *Patria*, our Father-land] remember me, unworthy though I am, for I am uncertain of entering it, and you know my necessities better even than I do

myself, and I, though so unworthy, will do for you all that I know, or am able, and will always do it. Be very full of joy, for you have a hundred reasons for rejoicing. I do not fail to have communications about you, to see you, and to know how you are. I feel that you must die now, nevertheless, I believe more in your judgment than in my own..... For the love of God send me a word, at least, and bless me, though unworthy. May our Lord who is always with you, give you all that you desire for His glory and help you in all your needs, temporal and spiritual. For this I also pray the most Holy Virgin, with all the angels and saints, and may they all help and assist you in all your wants, spiritual and temporal. Pray for me. *Deo gratias*. My father salutes you; at my request he has had two Masses said for you; one in honour of the Passion of Christ carrying His Cross, and the other of the Madonna da Monte, and he prays and procures prayers from everyone for your reverence, and recommends himself to you."

Another letter is most touching in its lowliness: "Prostrate on the ground, I beseech your pardon for all the trouble and anxiety which you have ever had on my account, and for all the disobedience and other faults committed by me. I beg of you for the love of God to pardon me, and to pray to Him that He may deliver me from all deceit and help me to overcome all contrarieties that may befall in anything against His Will. For the love of God take care of yourself and be cheerful.

Bless me; I thank you again infinitely, with all my heart, for all your goodness and the trouble you have taken for me, and I beg our Lord Himself to reward you, as I am sure He will. During these last few days I had written some things, but seeing how ill your reverence is, I burned them all."

Don Alvise died on the 27th of July, but there is uncertainty about the year, though it must have been either in 1641 or 1642. Five months after, Joanna writing to her father for his feast-day, St. John Evangelist, says: "O when shall we be with Christ, never again to part! It is five months to-day since that blessed soul took its flight to heaven who had so much charity towards my unworthy self and you. I cannot grieve except in my feelings; but I ought to have, and I have, a holy envy of him, and, in fact, I have felt his help more since he has been in heaven than before."

When Don Alvise died, the papers, written by his holy penitent for his eye alone, returned to her, and she immediately destroyed them. Of how much have we not been deprived by this act! She had written more than three hundred pages, in obedience to her confessor, about the various graces, ecstasies and revelations with which she had been favoured. Don Alvise had wished to assure himself, as far as possible, if they were from God, and for this reason had shown the manuscript to some persons noted for their prudence and holiness. Under this category came several reformed Franciscans, and first, Father Joseph da Lionessa, who,

after taking thirty days to read it, compared the writer to St. Catherine of Siena and St. Teresa.

Much as Joanna disliked the publicity thus necessarily given to her, she felt as anxious as anyone else could to be assured that the extraordinary ways by which God led her, should be tested. She was thankful too, for the humiliations that did not fail to follow in the adverse opinions and criticisms of some, who were the more ready to judge for the very reason that they were so little capable.

Don Alvise was not satisfied with the opinion of Father Joseph alone, and showed the papers to Father Thomas da Feltre, as well as to some others. This Father also was a Franciscan and a man of great sanctity, and his reputation for holiness was so great, that his life was written after his death. His opinion after reading the manuscript was as favourable as that of Father Joseph. A third to whom it was shown was also a Franciscan, Father Athanasius Schio, and he seems to have had no scruple of handing it over to a brother, who, after he had read it, desired eagerly to copy it. He began a little, and soon knew what it would cost him, for the devil, enraged, used every effort to prevent or retard his work. Frightful noises were heard, lights extinguished, and he himself thrown off his chair while he wrote; at other times when he wished to go into his cell and write, he would find the door bolted so firmly that no human strength could unfasten it, and it was only after the sign of the Cross and va-

rious exorcisms that it opened of itself, and a stench was perceived in the place for some time after. The evil one would sometimes take the form of a brother of the community, with an order from the superior to go and do some other work, and so on.

Still more wonderful events occurred in connection with the copying of these papers. There would sometimes be passages in them difficult to read, either from the writing or from the obscurity of the sense, and it was no unusual thing at these times for the servant of God to appear, raised a little from the ground, to the copyist in his cell, and explain away the difficulty. The friar had never seen Joanna and it seems a proof of the reality of these apparitions that he described her to the smallest detail, exactly as she was in appearance, dress and manner of speech. The Saint declared that she seemed to herself to be really in the friar's cell, telling him the things he wanted to know, but she did not feel sure whether he heard her or not.

These were not the only occasions on which Joanna could see what persons at a distance were doing. Very often she told her confessor what he had done at a certain hour, when she could not have known by ordinary means; his very thoughts were occasionally known by her, and the points of his meditations. He strove in every way to take all clues from her, but the result was the same, showing clearly that her knowledge did not come by ordinary means.

It was just before her confessor's illness that another proof of the truth of Blessed Joanna's revelations had occurred. His brother died, and she, who had always loved and prayed for the holy souls in purgatory, did not forget this one especially recommended to her. After a time he appeared to her in a state of suffering, bearing a sack of wheat on his shoulders. His brother on hearing this, immediately set to work to find if the dead had left a debt unsettled, and found to his surprise that a sack of wheat, bought from a poor person, had indeed remained unpaid. He at once discharged the debt, the suffering soul appeared again to Joanna, and thanking her for her prayers and the satisfaction that had been made, went joyfully to Heaven.

Of all the trials by which Blessed Joanna was purified, certainly none was greater than the temptation which at this time strongly assailed her to leave the Order of her profession. As we have seen, she loved her Rule, her great Father St. Benedict, and the saints who by their lives had proved what his spirit could do for them; she was full of that appreciation of the Liturgy which is the predominant fruit of his teaching, and yet she was sorely tried by the uncertainty as to whether God did not call her elsewhere. The doubt had come before the death of Don Alvisé, but that prudent director had led her safely, during his life, in the Order to which God had undoubtedly called her.

Her first desire as we know had been to become a daughter of St. Francis, but she seems to have recognised that that wish was no vocation, but the simple consequence of her education in Trent; and her entry, clothing, profession and after life at St. Jerome's were ample proof that God called her to the great Monastic Order, and to become a Saint by following St. Benedict's Rule.

What, then, was the probable cause of this temptation nearly twenty years after she had made her vows? One, her desire to hide herself from the world, and the other was, perhaps, the very natural desire shown in various ways by the Seraphic Order, to possess one whose sanctity had already blossomed in the Cloister of St. Benedict. As regards the first, it must be remembered that Joanna's fame was increasing every day. Not, as formerly, did a few friends come to see and consult with her, but strangers from distant places made voyages, for the one purpose of taking her counsel. Those who could not come importuned her with letters, and her time was literally filled with these exterior things, important very often in themselves, but, Joanna thought, outside her vocation.

Nor was this the only consequence, for many took umbrage at her charity, and imputed motives and ends to her of which she had never dreamt. Not the least was the report that she wished to make herself a name and become Abbess. Ecclesiastical Superiors were watching the flow of events, and to prevent such talk, it was even proposed to take

her from her Monastery and put her in another. It is not surprising, therefore, that Joanna herself should have thought of this, as perhaps a desperate resource, and it is equally natural that her Franciscan friends and confessors should have grasped at the idea, and cultivated it in the heart of the servant of God. Father George, a Capuchin, who was the confessor of the community, valued this soul too highly, and loved his own order too dearly not to encourage it also.

A holy Capuchiness, a namesake too, Sister Joanna Mary of the Cross, kept up a spiritual correspondence with our saint, who, in one of her letters, speaks of the desire she had to be amongst such "angels on earth"; but does not know, "if it would be according to the will of God"; and further on she speaks of the possibility of the idea being a temptation. Happily for Joanna, all doubt was set at rest in September 1642, when she writes that the question has been finally settled, and that she will think no more about it. And so indeed we shall find, as we proceed with her life, for she threw herself with redoubled fervour into the Spirit and practice of a Rule, said by a Council of the Church to be inspired by the Holy Spirit.



CHAPTER VIII.

(1642 — 1644)

Joanna as Mistress of Novices. Instances of her gift of bilocation.



TO form souls, to educate them for God, to develop the possibilities for a greater good in a reasonable, loving, human being, is surely one of the most privileged and beautiful of works. This was confided to Joanna. As Mistress of the school, she watched over the children sent to St. Jerome's for their education; as Mistress of Novices, she trained those called to leave all things to follow Christ.

We saw in speaking of St. Clare's at Trent, that education for women was very restricted at that time in convents, and, indeed, everywhere else. Such as was given, Blessed Joanna was capable of imparting, and parents eagerly availed themselves of her talent and sent their children to Bassano. But her great care was to form the moral character of her pupils, and this she considered could not be begun too early. She habituated them from the beginning to correct their faults, herself studying each character, so as to adapt the means to the end. She encouraged them to be charitable and compassionate to the poor and unfortunate, and they soon learned to put aside for them part of their food, thus practising the virtues both of

charity and mortification. She impressed on them devotion to our Lady, and taught them to turn to her in their difficulties and temptations. But it was when they manifested the desire to become nuns that her zeal for their progress in perfection increased. To found them in humility was her first care, for she knew that in proportion to the depth of the foundations, would be the height of the building.

One of her novices, Catherine Miozzi, who deeply appreciated her teaching, wrote down some of her instructions, and amongst them we find one on this subject. She begins by saying that "the venerable Mother strove, by all means in her power, to impress the virtue of holy humility on the hearts of her disciples by words, and, still more, by her example, and she appeared to have learnt from Christ Himself to be meek and humble of heart"; and then she gives the notes of one of her conferences — "The virtue of true humility is acquired, as I have always told you, by the following means: first, it must be asked of God with many prayers and entreaties, because as a certain saint says, we cannot be truly humble, without having received from God the grace to be so. Then we must consider our defects sins and miseries, and hold it for certain, as is really the case, that if God had left us to ourselves for one moment, we should have done all possible evil; there is no sin so great that, if God did not keep us by His grace, we might not commit. For the sins we have committed we

justly merit every evil, every humiliation, every pain, and above all, for our ingratitude. Consider again, how our Lord God has abased and humbled Himself for us; and we, who are so wicked, corrupt and miserable, imagine ourselves something. Think, too, how humble the Blessed Virgin and all the Saints were, and how far off we are from their humility, and if God did not help us, as He does, we should be still worse. Know then that, as I have always told you, all evil comes from want of consideration; therefore, do not lose time, but make use of the occasions of humility that our Lord sends you." Humility and the love of humiliation were not the only virtues taught by Blessed Joanna. Obedience, prompt, blind, cheerful, was a necessity of her novices' lives, for they were children of St. Benedict, who teaches that it is the most necessary of virtues in the Monastic State.

The Divine Office was the centre of their life, the Work for which they lived. To it they gave their bodies and minds in its ceremonies and its words. It sanctified the day which was lived in the thought of the Liturgy. Hence Joanna was careful to help them to enter into the mind of the Church, by suggesting thoughts and devotions suited to the Liturgical year. For example, during Advent she exhorted them in the words of the Divine Office, "to arise from sleep." It was Advent, their Lord was coming, and they must prepare to receive Him. Once at that time of the year she completely deceived them by

a pious legend. She told them in accents of fullest conviction, that a lady of high degree had fallen into great poverty, and that she was about to give birth to a child whom she was too poor to clothe. The novices, touched by the recital, hastened to propose that they should prepare all things necessary for her. Joanna bid them wait, and later she would tell them what to do. The first Sunday of Advent came, and then she told them that the great Lady was the Madonna, who was soon to bring forth the Saviour of the world. The cradle, the coverings, the swaddling clothes were the acts of humility and devotion to be made during the holy time of waiting for His birth, and these she assigned to each. Joyfully the novices undertook their tasks, and went fervently through an Advent, realised as none had ever been before.

As Christmas drew near Joanna's own devotion intensified, and she seemed to enter into the past as if it were present. She was accustomed to keep in her cell a beautiful little statue of the child Jesus, given to her by Donna Helen Foscari. Her devotion towards it was great, and often she melted into tears as she gazed upon it; then she would lay it in her arms and on her breast, and embracing it would break out into words of love. After a while it seemed to her as if her loving soliloquy became a conversation; she spoke, and the child answered; he looked and smiled upon her. After her death this image was returned to Donna Helen

who guarded it as a precious relic, leaving it in her will to the Teresians in Venice.

It is needless to say more of Joanna's own devotion towards the Divine Infant, as it has already been spoken of, but the foregoing will, at least, show how ingenious she was in preparing the novices for the feasts of the Church.

Amongst the many souls formed by her for monastic life, some may be mentioned more particularly. There was Catherine Miozzi, already referred to, who in after years became Abbess. At the age of fifteen, in the year 1643, she was a pupil at St. Jerome's, and very much perplexed as to her vocation. Blessed Joanna was full of interest in this soul who was the constant object of her prayers. One night, when she was praying with more than ordinary fervour, she saw in vision the young girl lying in bed asleep, and an angel clothed in cloth of gold and silver embroidered in blue and green and precious stones, stood over her; one wing overshadowed the bed, the other covered her. On his breast he bore a shield with the words: *Christus omnia vincit*, and on his head a helmet of purest gold. He watched over his young charge and defended her from all evil, saying that the devil knew well how pleasing her soul would be to God if she loved Him with all her heart. Joanna asked his name, and was told that it was Aureus, and that he belonged to the choir of the Cherubim. Praying that this soul so favoured by God might be

very faithful to Him, she saw a bright ray which, coming out of the Heart of the Crucified, entered that of the young girl. Catherine afterwards related that she had seen the same thing in her sleep, and awoke filled with the desire "to suffer and to die for her Love," as she expressed it. Then Joanna saw her Angel Guardian who, carrying a long ladder fashioned of gold and silver, sought a secure place on which to rest it, and to her great joy, he found it in the Monastery of St. Jerome. After this she beheld the soul of the sleeper in the form of a white dove, flying hither and thither, not knowing where to rest, until the angel pointed out the ladder on which it at last flew and settled.

Joanna interpreted the ladder to be the vocation of Catherine to the religious state, where she would be more pleasing to God than elsewhere; all the more pleasing too, because she had great difficulties to contend with when the time came for making her choice between life in the world, and life in the cloister. Strengthened by the advice and prayers of her holy mistress she persevered, and years after, referring to the vision, was able to write: "As to my vocation in this holy monastery, I can only say, that I feel such happiness in my state, that I would not change with the happiest woman in the world."

And, yet, she had great trials; interior trials that had been foretold to her by Joanna, and which lasted for many years; but they did not disturb

her peace of heart nor her union with God, for she knew that having entered His service, she must prepare her soul for temptation, and she went bravely on in the thought that, to those who love Him, all things work together for good.

Another of the souls educated by Blessed Joanna was Jane Frances Geremii, who, longing to consecrate herself to the immediate service of God in the same monastery, met with difficulties in doing so, for every cell was occupied. Two other young girls were equally anxious with her to be received, but all were told they must of necessity wait. This seemed a great trial to the eager aspirants, and Jane Frances had almost made up her mind to go elsewhere, when Blessed Joanna told her with conviction she might do as she liked, but that assuredly she would return, for God called her to serve Him there; and so it happened. In a short time the difficulties were removed, and Jane Frances received joyfully the holy Habit, and, under the direction of her saintly mistress, attained to great perfection. Later on she wrote a sketch of Blessed Joanna's life, which, however, was never completed. At the end of the manuscript she writes: "Now I can do no more, I, Sister Jane Frances Geremii."

It may be remembered that at the time that Joanna was outwardly favoured by God with the marks of His Sacred Passion, she had sleeping in her cell a little pupil named Pellegrina Costa. This child, later on, entered the noviceship. She, too,

had much to overcome. Being something of a chatterbox, she had great difficulty in keeping silence; a quick temper was the result of a lively character, and distractions assailed her at every spiritual exercise. Thanks to her own efforts and the patient help given her by her mistress, she learnt to overcome herself, and the day came when she could be held up to others as an example and mirror of what a nun should be.

Julia Navarrini, whose native place was Bassano, was another novice formed by Blessed Joanna. Her sensitiveness brought a strange difficulty on her; she persuaded herself that she would not be received to her clothing, and that it would be better for her to go elsewhere of her own free will, than be sent away. She revealed her thought to no one, but asked her mother to come and see her, intending to lay the case before her and ask to be taken away. Her mother came, and Joanna told the postulant to go to the parlour. "Go," she said, "your mother is waiting for you, but beware of saying to her what is in your heart. The devil desires to turn you from the vocation which God has given you; remember that if you do not stay here, you will not persevere anywhere else. This is a device of the evil one, who desires to have you, and to turn you from your purpose; be, therefore, constant, and doubt not that you will receive the holy Habit, for God calls you here." Julia lived to see the truth of this, and became a nun under the name of Serafina.

An instance is given us of one belonging to a good family, who desired to become a Benedictine, but she was without dowry and could not afford even the little trousseau necessary. The monastery was too poor to provide her with it, and it seemed as if she would have to give up the hope of entering. But Joanna knew the girl, and knew too that her soul was pleasing to God. She immediately had recourse to every means to obtain for her what was needed, and the modest dowry was given by John Bonomo, who seems never to have failed when called on to exercise charity.

Blessed Joanna's love of souls and desire to help them did not confine itself to the novices. Many were the friends to whom she was enabled to do good in the outer world. Donna Helen Foscari, of the noble and historical Venetian family of that name, was proud to be allowed to call her friend, and esteemed it as one of the greatest privileges of her life to pay an annual visit to Bassano, when she used frequently to go to the Monastery, and spend long hours in spiritual conference with the Saint.

At Bassano itself there were whole families, the members of which consulted her in doubts and difficulties, and considered themselves happy in following her advice, and from these families many of her most holy and spiritual daughters came. Not a few graces were obtained for these and other friends by her prayers, and miraculous graces were granted through her. The sick were warned of

approaching death, or were assured that they would recover; at other times she would obtain the birth of a child ardently desired by its parents. Nothing again was too small to interest her, and we find that like St. Anthony of Padua, she often obtained the recovery of lost or stolen articles for her friends. The following are some examples of this thoughtful charity.

The family of one of the nuns found that money was constantly disappearing from a writing table, where it was kept in a locked drawer, and no efforts availed to discover the culprit. This was all the more remarkable as the money was taken by degrees, and not the whole sum at once. At last the lady of the house resolved on going to ask the prayers of the servant of God for its recovery. When she had told her tale, Blessed Joanna prayed for a short time, and then told her visitor to seek in a particular spot in the house where she would find it had been hidden, and she described the house as accurately as if she had seen it. No sooner had the lady looked in the place indicated than she found the stolen money, which had been taken by one of the servants by means of a false key, and secreted until she could take it away unsuspected.

Another time it was the case of a nun of the Ara Cœli in Vicenza, who, for the decorations necessary for some feast, had borrowed a handsome carpet from one of the great families in the town. When the feast was over, she returned it to the servant who came to fetch it, and thought no more on the

subject. Nearly a year afterwards the lady who had lent it sent to ask its return from the nun, who, surprised and mortified, replied that she had sent it back immediately after having used it for the feast. It was sought for all over the house, but in vain, and the nun wrote to Joanna begging her to pray that it might be found. She wrote back and said that there need be no anxiety on the subject, as it would be found in the lady's house; and so it turned out, for the servant by whom it was sent back had put it in an unfrequented corner, and there it was at last found. Owing to the dismissal of the servant, who had left Vicenza some time before, it had been impossible to question her about it.

One more example of her power of recovering lost things, and then we must return to the friendships of Blessed Joanna.

A certain Signor Vincenzo Moretti had gone to Bassano, together with his wife, expressly to see the Saint. One day during their stay they went out for a drive; wandering on in places with which they were not well acquainted, they found themselves in a narrow lane bounded on either side by two walls, and dangerous for driving. Getting out of the carriage they walked behind it, when suddenly the coachman fell from the box, and the horses no longer feeling the rein galloped off. The carriage was broken to pieces before they could be stopped, and with much difficulty its late occupants saved themselves from being killed in that narrow space. At last a cart was

procured which took them back to Bassano, when the lady discovered that she had lost a valuable ring. She could not go back to the place of the accident to look for it, and therefore gave up all hope of seeing it again. She went to see Joanna, and gave an account of the events of the day, but found that she was acquainted with all that had happened, even to the loss of the ring, which she smilingly said would surely be found. When Signora Moretti returned to the house, she sought everywhere for it, thinking she might have mislaid it before going out, and after a fruitless search she retired to bed. In the morning she went into one of the rooms, and on entering she beheld her ring, the stone flashing before her in the sunlight. It was a room that had been thoroughly searched the day before.

One of Joanna's biographers, Sale, tells us, that "many bishops and prelates, holy religious, procurators of St. Mark's in Venice, senators, the first nobles in the Bride of the Adriatic, as also many of all classes from neighbouring cities, came to see and be advised by her." All she desired was to help them, and in this external work and distraction, she sought God's glory only. She had no preferences for some more than others, each was a soul made to God's image, but if she showed any difference, it was in attending first to the poor and humble. In seeing to the spiritual wants of those who came to her, Joanna never forgot, when Abbess, the hospitality which is a distinguishing

mark of every Benedictine monastery. She invariably procured rooms for those who could not from their number be received into the guesthouse, and was careful that every possible attention was paid them.

Her efforts for the good of others were not confined to the parlour only, her correspondence was immense; hundreds of letters asking help for the poor and afflicted were written by her; hundreds, again, of consolation and counsel to those who sought it. Her correspondents were of all grades and classes. The Abbot Lioni, a noble Paduan and a Venetian patrician, head of the Abbey of St. Nicholas of Lissa, was in constant intercourse with her, as also Count Alvise Porto and his sister Countess Clare. At Vicenza and Bassano nearly all the monasteries of monks and nuns were in correspondence with her. Various families of the same towns shared in this privilege, and the fruits of grace in holiness of life in those so brought into contact with her, whether they were in the world or the cloister, were very apparent. It is unnecessary to remark that all this active work for her neighbours' good was suspended during that time of suspicion and trial, when she was forbidden all communication with persons outside the monastery.

If such relations were kept up with other orders, and with seculars, what shall be said of her relations with her own Order, its members and its monasteries? The Benedictine nuns of St. Blaise

at Venice, who possessed the great treasure of the incorrupt body of their holy foundress, Blessed Juliana of Collalto; those of SS. Andrew and Mark, and those of the Holy Angels at Murano, corresponded with her and united their prayers to hers.

Her father was in frequent communication with the Abbey of Benedictine monks in Vicenza, and we find her asking him in 1640, for the love of God, to procure a copy of the Rule they had had printed with their Declarations and indulgences attached. On this last she laid great stress, having learned, she says, that since the famous reform of St. Justina of Padua, many indulgences and privileges had been granted, and many things changed. In that same letter she speaks of one of the monks of the Congregation of St. Justina, in terms that make us long to know more about him: "I have heard that at Venice (in the monastery of Saint George) there is one of our good Fathers, Dom Domenico, formerly cellarer at Saint Justina, who works many miracles and is in great repute of holiness throughout the city. May God be praised for it! Amongst other sick persons cured by his blessing alone, there was a nun of San Daniele, who had been crippled for the last nine or ten years and confined to her bed, besides being in a state of great depression. She was carried to him to receive his blessing and to speak with him, and was immediately cured of her illness and delivered also from the scruples and low spirits with which she had

been troubled. She is now well in body and mind. This happened quite lately, as one of the brothers there wrote and told me. This proves to us that grace is not less plentiful in our times than in others! O my God, *Non est abbreviata manus Domini.*"

Dom Leo Bracco made researches about this holy monk, and discovered that he was from Cologne, his family name was Ghilardi, and in 1620 he was professed at St. Justina, Padua, consequently he was Joanna's contemporary both in religion and age. Surely, it must be possible to find out more about one whose reputation was so widely spread during his life.

There was at Vicenza a Benedictine monastery of nuns, dedicated to St. Peter. With this house Joanna was in constant and extraordinary communication. The community was composed of nuns of the highest families, who kept the Rule with fervour. Dame Placida, who belonged to the family of the Counts 'of Neve, was her special friend and confidant, to whom she constantly wrote. In one of her letters, she tells her that she had been in that monastery in spirit three times, adding that our Lord was satisfied with the state of the monastery, and especially with the way in which the sick were cared for; that the community was blessed by Him, and visibly protected by the Blessed Virgin and St. Benedict. In her letters she refers to several little details of the house, which she could not have known without having seen it. This gift of bilocation was used very often by Joanna, and through

it she was enabled to see many famous sanctuaries, such as Jerusalem, Rome, Milan, Loreto and Assisi.

Jerusalem was most dear to her as the scene of her Lord's Passion and Death, and in reference to it the following wonderful story is related. There was a certain Father Benedict, a Franciscan, a native of Bassano, who was sent to Jerusalem in 1634, and on account of the various offices he held, was at many different places in the east. One morning he was celebrating Mass at Jerusalem, and turning round at the Communion, he beheld a nun dressed in the Benedictine habit. He started; surely it was Dame Joanna to whom, as a friend of long years, he had said goodbye before leaving for the Holy Land. He looked again: yes, it was indeed she. For forty successive days this scene was repeated. Still he doubted, and it was only on his return to Bassano that he could assure himself of the reality of what he had seen.

This is one example of the many that might be cited concerning this gift, for we are told how it was exercised in regard, not to one or two persons, but to many; not in one or two places, but in several, and although we may not be able to explain it, the facts seem to have been well inquired into. When it happened in cases of Religious, it was easy to keep the marvel a secret, but when seculars also experienced her wonderful gift, it soon became the subject of general conversation, and a most remarkable event occurred, attested by many who were able to give evidence about it.

A young boy who lay dangerously ill, and whom she had never seen, had been recommended to Joanna's prayers. One morning, after Communion, she was praying earnestly for him, when she suddenly seemed to be transported to a room where he was lying on a bed. She tried to encourage him, and told him to recommend himself to St. Francis who was his patron saint. She then blessed him, and told him to rise, as he was now cured. All this occurred as Joanna knelt in the choir making her thanksgiving, and she could not be sure if what she saw was real or not. The question was soon set at rest. The sick boy had seen her at that same moment in his room, where she had seemed to bless him, to tell him to recommend himself to St. Francis, and to rise from his bed. He did rise, completely cured, and was able to describe Joanna, her dress, and everything about her, as minutely as if he had known her intimately.

Wonderful is God in His saints, and His ways in them past finding out: who shall straiten His arm, or put a bound to His mercy or His power?



CHAPTER IX.

(1644 — 1648.)

Triennial election. New confessor appointed.
She is accused of insanity, hypocrisy and
ambition. Father Paul and his companion.
Vision of St. Agnes. Illness and cure.



HE Bishop of Vicenza was at this time Cardinal Marc' Antonio Bragadino, and his Vicar General was Lauro Arrigoni a native of Vicenza. Both were prejudiced against Blessed Joanna, believing reports that they heard and acting upon them.

The triennial election of the Abbess was due in the spring of this year, and the Bishop resolved to make his visitation at the same time. He arrived at the monastery on the Eve of St. Benedict's Feast. Troubles began at once. The greater part of the community, whose esteem for Joanna had deepened at the constant sight of her heroic virtue, wished to elect her. Her ability fitted her also for the management of the temporal affairs of the monastery, and at that very time she was doing the duties of cellarer and making up the accounts, though it was not her office.

There were four nuns considered capable of the important duty of governing, but "the community wished to have the best they could get at their head, and none could be compared to the servant

of God." So wrote Dame Clara Austoni to Signor Bonomo a fortnight later. She says that although by the Rule and Statutes Joanna could be elected, yet that episcopal interference prevented the effect of the votes. The writer adds; "if she is not a saint I do not know who can be called one. You have indeed received a grace in having such a daughter as this blessed Mother Joanna Mary. Truly, should you have no other glory in heaven than what your dearest daughter will bring you, you would be very glorious..... As we could not make her Abbess we did all we could in order that she might be the right hand of the one elected, who is indeed a good mother, and accepted the office, confiding in Divine help and the assistance of Sister Joanna Mary."

The facts of the election were not much to the credit of some concerned in it. The servant of God had not attained the canonical age for election, but it lay in the power of the Bishop to dispense with that if the community so desired. This was the more reasonable and regular as St. Benedict legislates that; "he who is to be chosen to this dignity should be chosen on account of his virtuous life, his learning, and his wisdom, even though he be the last in the community."

The Bishop, however, refused. His previous prejudices were strong, and unfortunately were still further strengthened by some of the members of the community. These latter were Dames Maurus and Scholastica Fossa who were sisters,

Dame Faustina Navarrini, and Dame Teresa Fava, a small number and of little importance in a community of forty. One of these, Dame Teresa, had at one time been very devoted to Blessed Joanna, to whom she used to confide her longings after sanctity and a more austere life. So great indeed had been her zeal, that she prayed rather to die than to fail in perfection. Nothing less than having a cilice "as soon as it was possible to have one" would content the ardours of her fervour. Unhappily she does not seem to have cultivated either a spirit of humility, or of that interior life which leads from multiplicity to simplicity, from the creature to the Creator, and which would have restrained her from meddling in external things which did not concern her. Strangely enough, she, the youngest of the faction of four, led the others, and all tried to lower Joanna's reputation and prevent her being made Abbess.

The result of the election was that to Joanna's great joy, another was elected, and she herself filled with humiliation.

In concluding the visitation the Bishop suggested that if anyone thought she had greater graces than the others she should hide and not publish them, and above all refrain from writing. No one doubted to whom this recommendation was really made, and Joanna thought it her duty to write to him after he had left, and explain clearly to whom and how often she wrote, humbly adding that she did so principally for the affairs of the Monastery

at the desire and with the knowledge of her Abbess.

No answer came to this reasonable and humble letter and Joanna, who saw in every superior the representative of God, anxiously wrote again. At last a reply came. Hard and unjust as it appears we must not forget that God has many ways of educating, purifying and leading His chosen. She was told that for the future she had better abstain from writing to anyone except her father, and to him only most rarely. She was not to go to the parlour, or have any communications with those outside the convent, except with women who were near relations.

At this very time, when more than ever Joanna wanted help, counsel and encouragement, a new confessor was appointed to the monastery, who was to be a great instrument in God's hands for her trial. Hitherto her confessors had, after a time, all believed in and helped her, even if at first they had doubted or hesitated.

Don Domenico Veglia was a secular priest and a native of Bassano; he was upright and conscientious, and much esteemed by his superiors who confided many delicate charges to him. He was, however, unsympathetic, harsh and narrow, and, in consequence, inclined to be obstinate. Few people, it would appear, could have been more repelling to a timid soul already tried by her own doubts and temptations as well as by the adverse opinion of others; yet such was the man purposely chosen

by the Vicar General to be the confessor of the nuns and of Dame Joanna.

He began by resolving to root out of her all mystical tendencies, and as a first means forbade her to mention to him in or out of confession anything of the kind. No sympathy was to be shewn her, no help given, but on all occasions and at all times, mortification and humiliation were to be meted out to her. Like her Divine Model, she was to be "saturated with reproaches;" reproaches accepted contentedly and borne joyfully, so that she could write to her father with perfect tranquillity, on a subject of which he knew so much, and into which he had been brought by those responsible for the soul of his child :

"I am not troubled" so she writes, alluding to the doubts cast upon the reality of her visions and ecstasies : "if all these things are from God, I bless and thank Him; if He allows me to be deceived, I bless and thank Him equally. I offer Him all, and only pray Him to let me get as much merit from this trial as He desires."

The sacraments were refused to her for weeks, and sometimes for months, and humiliations of an extraordinary nature constantly imposed upon her. To such an extent were these trials carried, that the Episcopal Curia, though so opposed to our Saint, was obliged to interfere, and counsel prudence and discretion in the direction of this soul, advising the Confessor not to exceed the limits of his office.

But a fresh thorn was planted in Joanna's heart, and new difficulties presented themselves before her, for all her old doubts re-asserted themselves, and she wondered if she really were deceived. She therefore wrote in the third person a short account of herself and the ways by which God led her, relating how her present confessor believed her to be subject to delusion, and refused to listen to anything she wished to say; how the graces she received grew more frequent under trial, and how unable she was to resist them. Her superiors refusing to listen to her, and having thus no one to help and counsel her, she says that she turned to God, saying "O Lord if these things come from Thee, grant me the grace to draw from them that fruit which will please Thee, and if they do not come from Thee, in Thy Love, deliver me from them that they may not hurt my soul." So she resigned herself to the Divine Will, expecting from heaven the help that was refused her on earth.

The statement she drew up was sent to a pious and learned Capuchin, Father Fortunatus of Vicenza, of the convent of Lonigo, on November 29th, 1644. He replied by what may be almost called a treatise on the subject of extraordinary graces. Dom Leo Bracco gives the following summary of his letter.

"Father Fortunatus distinguishes four kinds of revelations and apparitions. The first is when God speaks interiorly to the soul, and with sudden light manifests events both present and future;

the sign that these come from God is an increase in the soul of humility, mortification, contempt of self and of the world. The second kind is the exterior voice, by which one hears someone speaking, who is sometimes seen, sometimes invisible; the fear in this is that sometimes the devil, crafty and subtle as he is, may assume the voice and appearance of a saint, an angel, our Lady, and even our Lord Himself, to instil a seductive sweetness into the soul. At first sweetness is felt, but this is afterwards changed to disquietude and disturbance. On the contrary, in the operations of God, doubt and fear come first, and are succeeded by quiet and peace. To guard against deception one must humble oneself, acknowledge oneself unworthy of favours, refuse them, desire to be deprived of them, and pray to God not to be deceived. Then thirdly come the imaginative revelations, not that they are works of the imagination, but God paints them, so to speak, so vividly, either in dreams or when awake, that they do not seem merely a picture, but a reality. Finally, God may manifest His will by exterior signs, as by the ladder of Jacob, the bush of Moses, the fleece of Gideon etc."

Such were the general lines laid down by this good Capuchin, but Joanna's father, who, as we have seen, had been all along mixed up with the troubles concerning her, was not satisfied, and consulted two others, Father Joseph of Bassano, and Father James of Cadore. Both of them, quite

independently of each other, came to a favourable conclusion, and our Saint was greatly relieved and comforted. A letter written by Joanna to her father a week before Father Fortunatus had replied to her statement, gives us an insight into the disposition of her mind : — “ I am sorry that you have been grieved by certain contrarieties which give me occasion for merit and virtue..... Pray do not be distressed, I beg of you indeed to thank God for me, as these are favours of which I am unworthy. Believe me, nothing would trouble me except the thought of dying without suffering, this would trouble me exceedingly, all the rest is nothing to me, for the great desire I have for suffering ; and when I hear things said against me, I seem to hear most delicious music.

As she wrote so she acted To the accusations of insanity, hypocrisy and ambition, she replied by a joyous exterior and profound humility, thus putting into practice the fourth degree of humility, which St. Benedict tells us is shewn by rejoicing when things that are hard, contrary and injurious are done to us. So grateful a love had she for those who made her suffer, that when presents were sent her, the only favour she begged of the Abbess was that those who were especially inimical to her, as Dames Maurus, Scholastica, Faustina and Teresa, should have them. When some of her sisters remonstrated at this, and asked her how she could not only bear such injuries, but even repay them with gifts, she simply replied : “ Dear Sisters

teach me to pray, and not to revenge myself." Her cousins Dames Marietta, Clara and Angelica used to say to her playfully: "You never give anything to us your best friends, but everything goes to those who are rude and impertinent to you." The saint would reply: "but it is they and not you who do me a great service." She went still further; and when one of her persecutors was ill, she nursed her with loving care, and prayed that God would send her the illness and cure the patient. The words of Dame Justina, that whoever wanted a favour of Dame Joanna must do her an injury, soon became a proverb in the house. The thought that strengthened her to bear peacefully and to persevere was, as she wrote to her father Nov. 23nd, 1644, that of her Divine Spouse — "What did they not say of Him! — yet He was God and as St. Augustine says, willed so to suffer, *Ad solatium servorum suorum*."

Joanna was not insensible to the unkindness and injuries of which she was the object, on the contrary, she acknowledged to the Contessa Porto that when so treated, she felt her feelings rise, but fought so hard against the first motion, that at last she was able to triumph over every internal movement. She would turn lovingly to her Lord and say: "Do Thou, O my Lord, think about it for me, for I will not let my thoughts dwell on it, and if it be pleasing to Thee, I wish to think of nought else but Thee."

In proportion as Joanna's sufferings and humiliations increased, so did her power with God, and His marvellous gifts in her. A very beautiful instance

of this occurred during this year. A young man named Paul, a native of Mantua, after having distinguished himself by his learning amongst the Oblates of St. Ambrose, entered, as has already been related, the Franciscan Order. We are told, as an evidence of his remarkable talent, that soon after this he was sent to Venice, where he was called upon to sustain a public dispute with one of the Rabbis, and in order to be the better able to do it, he studied and learned sufficient Hebrew in a fortnight. But zeal for God's service, and the desire of promoting His glory, filled his heart more than learning, and he began to wonder if he could do more for that end, by going to preach the Gospel to the heathen. Before making a formal request to his superiors, he wrote to Joanna, to ask her to pray that he might know God's Will on the subject.

Her answer came in a few words: "Depart fearlessly, you will endure, you will overcome, you will die for Christ." This was in 1641, and towards the end of the year he set out for Albania, the mission confided to him. He was then thirty, and for two years he remained in Cattaro teaching theology and learning the Slav language. His next post was Gruda where he suffered persecution, not only from the Turks, but also from bad Christians, and his life was threatened more than once. Polygamy was rife and scandal great, and the fervent missionary could not hold his peace, and preaching zealously drew increased hatred upon himself. On the 7th December, 1644, the people were keeping the feast of

St. Nicholas at Tunis, Father Paul and his companion, Father Salvatore of Offida, resolved to go there, in order, if possible, to prevent some of the wickedness usually carried on at this gathering. The inhabitants of Gruda entreated them not to go, but in vain. They were received with many marks of reverence, and the mission they gave was productive of great fruit to some souls. On the last day the chief man of the village invited the priests to dinner, when Father Paul spoke with great vehemence against the open scandals he had witnessed and heard of. His host showed no signs of anger and offered his guests an escort back to Gruda, with a mule to carry the sacred vestments they had brought with them. They set out accompanied by a servant belonging to their host, two Christians and a Turk. On reaching a certain point of the road, the escort possessed themselves of the sacred vestments, and commanded the two Fathers to give up all the money they had; they answered that being poor friars they had none. For a while no more was said, but soon the Fathers heard the other two say to the Christians, that they must keep their word and kill the friars, and looking round, they saw the ruffians ready to spring upon them. They immediately knelt down, and, in the words of the account sent to Propaganda afterwards, "drawing out their Rule from the folds of their habit, and holding it in their hands, they lifted their eyes and arms to Heaven, as if not merely expecting, but even inviting death."

Thus did they receive the crown of martyrdom on the 9th Dec., 1644; one was pierced by a lance, the other had his head broken open.

Six weeks later the faithful of Gruda went in search of the two missionaries, and discovered their bodies as fresh and beautiful as in life, where they had been left by their murderers. On Father Paul was found the letter written to him three years before by Blessed Joanna. After burying the martyrs with all honour, they wrote an account to Rome of all the circumstances, and enclosed the letter they had found.

In the midst of her trials, the news of this glorious death due to her counsels and to her prayers, must have been an incentive to the saint to persevere on the road of her longer and more painful martyrdom.

Many cures, instances of prophecy, and knowledge of events passing at a distance, are told about this time, and, indeed, accompany her whole life; but, not to weary the reader, only the more remarkable will be related. Her virtue is a far more striking miracle than anything else that can be recorded, especially her patience during these years.

It might seem that her trials could hardly have been greater than they already were, and yet with the new year of 1645 they increased. For seven years she was not allowed to write to her father; in 1648 she was forbidden to speak to any person outside the monastery, her sister and near relations not excepted. She was looked upon as a mad

person who had to be under restraint for fear of injury to others. All this she endured with marvellous resignation, as well she might, for she lived for God alone, and He sufficed her. Hardest perhaps of all her trials was the refusal of Holy Communion, which she sometimes received only once in six months.

One year, on the eve of the Feast of St. Agnes, she was occupied in collecting the eggs in the poultry-yard, and having finished her work she retired to the choir to pray, grieving that she might not receive her Lord on the feast of the sweet virgin martyr she loved so well. It was two hours before the *Ave*, which in Italy is always rung half an hour after sunset. As she prayed, the young saint appeared to her and bid her be comforted, as the heart of her confessor would change, and she would receive the Bread of Angels on the morrow. She rose as usual next morning, and put on her cowl in preparation for the Divine Guest. While engaged in reading her Abbess sent for her, and marvelling to see her in her cowl, said: "What have you been doing, perhaps you think you are going to Communion?" She answered, — "Yes Mother, if it please God." "Go, then, for this morning you are to receive Holy Communion."

Great was the surprise of the community, for they knew only too well the relentless rigour of Don Domenico. The fact was that he had been compelled the evening before, by an unseen power, to make up his mind to communicate Joanna next

day. Resist as he might, he had been forced to submit to a higher will than his own, and in the morning he had sought the Abbess and told her the circumstances.

But the divine interference did not rest there on that wonderful day. A priest came to say mass at St. Jerome's, who was evidently much disturbed in mind, for even at Mass he could not altogether conceal his troubled state, and Don Domenico, who was present, noticed this unusual behaviour in a priest whom he knew so well. Dame Joanna, however, enlightened from above knew the cause, and speaking in confidence, said that it concerned giving help and comfort to one in need of it, and of soothing great sorrow. These words were repeated to the priest, who then saw that she knew his trouble to which those words were the key.

These interventions of God in her behalf had however no immediate effect as regarded her Communions. The confessor never told her whether she might communicate or not, but, as he himself said the community Mass, would allow her to present herself at the grating, and then send her away without communicating her.

That he should have been permitted to take so much upon himself is inexplicable, but the prejudice against the servant of God was so strong, that things were allowed, which otherwise would have been impossible.

How deeply she felt this deprivation may be seen in one of her writings, where she says: " Nothing

troubles me, except not being able to confess and communicate when I wish; this is the only thing I feel—for in this world there is nothing else I desire. He has left Himself to us in the most holy Sacrament, remaining imprisoned in our churches, and He has given me a hunger, a great longing and desire to receive Him, but my sins deprive me of so great a good. It seems to me that if this Sacrament were not in the world, one could not live; it would be impossible for those serving God to live long in this exile without It; but by It they are consoled and strengthened to go on and live, so long as it pleases God. Happy are they to whom He gives the grace of frequent Communion, for they enjoy a paradise on earth; but I console myself and say: "O Lord since I am unworthy of It, and Thou allowest me to suffer so much, I am certain that all the more abundantly Thou wilt communicate Thyself to my soul in another life; behold how I thirst after Thee!"

Many holy persons helped Joanna with their prayers during this time, and this was a great consolation to her. Above all she valued the mention of her name at Mass, and speaks with great gratitude of those who thus remembered her.

On the death of Don Alvise, Joanna had destroyed the papers she had written and sent to him, but since that time others had accumulated, and perhaps some of an older date had escaped destruction. However that may be, it appears that Cardinal Bragadino sent her an order about this time, to

burn all that she had written, especially any account of her visions. This she did with willing obedience, for her humility revolted from keeping records of graces, written either in obedience, or in order to get counsel. How, under these circumstances, any manuscripts should have been preserved is remarkable, but the escape of a few from the general destruction is a great gain, as thus, in some cases, we are able to use Joanna's own words for our text, when relating her life.

After a long illness she tells us, speaking always in the third person, how she was cured. "One night, it being the eve of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross, our Lord appeared to her, called her, and said, *Ecce sana facta es, vade*. She instantly felt herself cured, and rose, and went to matins to the astonishment of the community, who did not know what had taken place, and feared she was delirious. It was with great difficulty she convinced those around her that she was cured, till they saw with their own eyes that it was so." So for Dame Joanna. Dame Placida Tacconi gives the following account:

"One night as she lay in bed, our Lord Jesus Christ appeared to her, and cured her, saying many words in latin, which I do not exactly remember; He commanded her to rise, as she was now quite well. She then went to recite the Divine Office with the other Religious, no longer suffering the pain which she had borne with such wonderful patience, as to make all the nuns say, that this

alone would suffice to give her the reputation of a Saint."

In 1641 Joanna had had a vision of a little boat on a stormy sea, in which she was to be tossed about on the waves of tribulation, of sufferings, within and without. She had not been told how long this should last, but had been shewn the smiling valley emblematic of peace, where she should rest when it was over, and the path leading up a mountain. Seven years after this in 1648 our Lord appeared to her one day in great glory, and again showed her the boat, but now near the valley. Taking her by the hand He made her disembark, and the angry sea and its waves disappeared. She then beheld one of the seraphim, and our Lord said to her; "Because thou hast been faithful in resigning thyself, and content to suffer all the tribulations, illnesses, temptations and persecutions through which thou hast passed, I give to thee this seraph, one of My most dear and loving servitors, that he may make thee participate in the love with which he burns; and if thou dost correspond, still greater graces shall be given thee." He then gave her instructions on the various degrees of love, humility and self-annihilation, and left her filled with consolation.

Thus God gave his servant more trials, but he also sent new grace and fresh strength to her. The illness from which she had suffered was cured, but she was now attacked by another of a most painful kind, as it not only caused her physical pain, but obliged

her to be kept quite apart from the community. Its exact nature seems uncertain, some authors of her life call it leprosy, others seem to think it was merely a cutaneous disease of a very contagious nature. Whatever it was, all agree in saying that this humiliating illness lasted for three years, and from various facts we gather that she must have recovered from it about 1650. During all that time she had suffered, sometimes more sometimes less, but had never been altogether free from it. Add this disfiguring malady to the terrible trials she was already enduring, deprivation of the sacraments, separation from all she most loved, constant penance, humiliation, dislike, calumny, even to the charge of hypocrisy, ambition, madness and witchcraft, and have we not the model in her of a soul perfectly dead to self and living to God? Surely few souls have carried to so heroic an extent the perfect practice of the degrees of humility drawn up by St. Benedict! When at last the malady left her, its cure was not the result of human remedies. The freshness and beauty of her skin became as before, and Joanna bore no mark of the time, when, like her Divine Spouse she was "esteemed a leper and no man."

Great was the purification of a soul so dear to God, so generous in her love, and so ardent in her thirst for suffering. Her prayers were not words only, what she asked she really hoped for, and so we must not wonder, that as this suffering was taken away, another was given. The last was a painful

internal disease which necessitated an operation. From this the servant of God shrank, saying she would rather die than allow that which, to her delicate conscience, seemed to take the bloom off the modesty she had always so deeply cherished. One day she was bitterly complaining in prayer of her perplexity and meditating on the shame her Lord endured in His sacred Passion, especially during the scourging, when there appeared to her a choir of angels, bearing in their hands crosses, crowns and palms; they were followed by our Lord as He was when He suffered to expiate the sensual sins committed in the world. Joanna understood from this vision, that the shame she would suffer in the operation, from which she had so shrunk, would be accepted in union with His nakedness, and would merit for her the crown of martyrdom. God accepted her sacrifice, but she was spared all suffering of mind and body during the operation, for she fell into an ecstasy before it began, and continued in it while it lasted.

The period of Joanna's trial was drawing to a close. For years she had endured every possible humiliation and suffering, and had come out of the furnace purified. Her confessor was one of the last to be convinced of the sincerity and sanctity of his penitent, and still refused her the sacraments.

One day he only consecrated a sufficient number of particles for those who were going to communicate. When Joanna presented herself she was, as usual, sent away. She retired in great grief

to her stall, when she beheld an angel who going to the ciborium which the priest was holding in his hands, took from it the sacred Host, and coming to her, gave her the Body of her Lord. When the celebrant came to the last sister he found that he could not give her Communion, as the ciborium was empty. He was much troubled for he knew how many particles he had consecrated, and could not account for the fact. Then he thought of Joanna, and with much hesitation sent for her and asked if she had communicated. She answered that she had, and after some time told him what had happened. He could not disbelieve her, and began to wonder whether after all it was not he himself who had been deceived. Boldly and courageously he examined the past, and frankly admitted he had been wrong. Wishing to leave a lasting memorial of the miracle, he built eleven years afterwards in 1655, a pretty little church some distance from the monastery and still existing, and dedicated it under the title of the Angel Guardian: attached to it he founded a school for poor boys. The miracle was also memorialised by a sonnet, of which the following is a translation, composed for the Beatification of the Saint by James Vitorelli, a noble Bassanese.

“Arise,” he said. The virgin quite abashed
In meekness lifts her eyes, but not assumes
Courage to brook the splendour that forth flashed
Through the thick veil of th’interlacing plumes.

“To thee,” the Angel added, “Heaven me sends :
Mercy at length thy yearning doth achieve.

Take comfort, maiden ; this thy wrongs amends ;
This food, which cometh from on high, receive."

He ceased, and opening his resounding wings,
Disclos'd the heavenly vessel, and the night
Blazed out supernal with its glisterings.
Thrill'd through she faints ; with tear-filled eyes all bright
And sobs, at th'Heavenly Presence prostrate clings :
With proffer'd tongue she takes the Bread of Light.

CHAPTER X.

(1648 – 1653.)

St. Peter consigns to Joanna the keys of the monastery. Love and devotion towards St. Benedict. Illness and cure.



O favourable had the nuns become towards Joanna, seeing her marvellous patience and humility and knowing her natural gifts, that, when the triennial election of the Abbess came round in 1652, they elected her to that office. As she was over the canonical age there was no question of any dispensation from the bishop, so that he could not interfere ; and we may suppose that he was either convinced of his former prejudice and injustice, or tired of making difficulties ; be this as it may, the election met with no obstacle.

The first days of Joanna's superiority were spent by the community in retreat, and when it was over a new confessor was appointed, who inspired

respect and confidence from the beginning. Well might Joanna commence her government with trust in God Who had laid it on her shoulders. She had indeed tried to decline the office and even repulsed a heavenly messenger sent to her. The old biographer, to whom we owe a debt of gratitude for having preserved this charming incident, tells us that as she was kneeling in prayer in the Oratory, St. Peter appeared and consigned to her the keys of the monastery, but she refused them and threw them on the ground, upon which the Prince of the Apostles smiled.

Up to the moment of her election as abbess, the restrictions about writing and seeing anyone outside the monastery had remained in full force, and she was in doubt therefore what to do. Some learned and pious religious, whom she consulted told her that in everything pertaining to her office she must certainly consider herself free to act as she judged necessary, but beyond that they advised her to keep to the letter of the prohibition.

Joanna taught not only by words, but much more by example, how dear the practice of the monastic life should be to those who have the happiness to profess it; for instance she was always the first in choir, and even took on herself the duty of calling the community for matins, mindful that St. Benedict says: "The abbot shall take care both night and day to signify the hour for the work of God, either by announcing it himself, or by entrusting the duty of so doing to some watchful brother."

In order to get more time for prayer, she often rose before midnight when the bell of the Capuchin Monastery close by rang for matins, and uniting herself with the friars would await her own office which was said at 2. a.m. She impressed upon her nuns the words of the Holy Rule, that "heart and voice should accord together," and her devotion at this holy and privileged duty was very evident.

There were times, too, when God gave her a knowledge of what was passing in the minds of those in choir. One day she coughed loudly in the midst of the psalmody, and when the Office was over Dame Pellegrina Costa said to her: "Mother, why did you cough during the psalms?" She answered drily: "Because you were giving way to distractions in choir." This had really been the case with many of the sisters, who, when they heard their Abbess cough, were recalled to themselves and found how far their thoughts had strayed from their Office.

As her knowledge of latin was a great help to her own devotion, we cannot doubt that she had taught and encouraged her novices to learn the language of the Liturgy, so that they could enter more fully into the spirit of the Church as they recited their Office.

When we consider the learning of the nuns in the Anglo-Saxon monasteries; when we remember how latin was studied in the community of St. Gertrude and St. Mechtildis six hundred years later,

and when we see that the tradition of such studies continued in the Order, we are surprised that it could be possible for a certain young priest to doubt Joanna's knowledge of latin, and be astonished when he put it to the proof. Who, if not those whose lives are dedicated to Divine Praise, should know the language of the Church? Is it possible to imagine much real love of the Liturgy, or appreciation of its treasures, if the language in which it is written is not understood? "Sing ye with understanding," says St. Benedict, quoting the Psalmist, and in proportion as that spirit is kept up in a Benedictine Community, so will be its fervour.

The zeal of the new Abbess did not confine itself to regularity and the Divine Office; she strove in yet other things to lead the community to higher perfection; for instance, she introduced the custom of wearing serge instead of linen for under garments; she insisted on great attention being paid to silence, knowing how essential it is to a spirit of prayer, and therefore abolished talking in the refectory, as being not only a violation of silence but most incongruous in a religious community, as was also the childish and unmonastic keeping of carnival days.

Those who had always been inimical to Joanna appear to have hidden their feelings at the commencement of her government, or perhaps the prejudice against her was dormant for a time. If one may judge from her letters, she seems to have

believed in their protestations of devotion; and the confidence that such a belief inspired must have been a great help at the beginning. Many there were whose loyalty was above suspicion, and these were most anxious about her health; they used to say it was impossible to live on the small amount of food she ate. She certainly did this from a spirit of mortification, but she used to say: "I am so accustomed to it that it would hurt me to eat more." This was true, but she had brought herself to it by the great command she had exercised over herself and the mortification which led her to take only what was absolutely necessary. To please her nuns she used to try and eat what they brought her, but even in this exercised the virtues of charity and mortification, striving to take what she did not want or like, because they asked her.

Spiritual things were Joanna's first care, but she was neither forgetful nor incapable of managing the temporal affairs of the house. At the beginning of her government she found the building so in want of repair that it was difficult to say the Divine Office in choir; debts abounded, and there were only three silver scudi,—about twelve shillings in English money,—to meet the wants of a large community. A letter to her father gives us an insight into the daily expenses, for in it she says: "I must now have two casks of wine, and there is neither flour nor grain in the house... Every week more than three scudi go in meat alone, five francs and more in fish, six or seven in eggs."

In every order for flour and other farinaceous things, she always found that the merchant gave her over and above. Her father, too, was of valuable assistance; he helped with advice and in other practical ways; at one time we find her asking him for wood to build and enlarge a granary; at another she gets help from one of her cousins, Count Pagello. Happily there were debts owing to the monastery, and Joanna's hope was to get some of them paid, especially those due from the Venetian treasury.¹

So well were things managed that not only was she able to pay off what she owed, but was enabled to repair the monastery, the church and sacristy, to get new vestments and sacred vessels for the altar, in fact, to make all things new, and to provide the community with every necessity, food, clothes and furniture. In consequence of this, regularity could be well kept up, and unnecessary anxiety and care about temporal matters became a thing of the past.

With all this the holy Abbess never forgot the poor, and when she might have increased the capital of the community she chose rather to lay it up in alms. Soon she came to be called the Mother of the poor, and the great Alms-giver. The

¹ In consequence of the war against the Turks, the Venetian government had been compelled to borrow largely from private individuals and corporations, who received a yearly interest on the amount advanced. Together with other Monasteries that of St. Jerome had lent a considerable sum.

Monastery was always opening its door to some person who wanted food or a few pence to carry home. Bread, soup, and, at times, even wine were freely distributed. Her greatest pleasure was to help those who from affluence had fallen into poverty, and in order to make it less painful to them to receive alms, she would herself attend to their needs, doing so with a courtesy and delicacy which none could have equalled, and deftly making it appear that she was receiving, not conferring, a favour. Nor would she give the poor the scraps left by the community, or things they would not eat: "Does it seem right" she would say "to give the worst to the poor?" Her refinement revolted from making charity degrading to the recipients. Clothes, and even bales of cloth, as well as food were constantly sent to her, that she might give them away, and thus the poor went both fed and clothed from the gates of St. Jerome's. This love of the poor she learned from her holy Founder, and she gave orders that in his honour the first poor person who came in the morning should always have a very large loaf of bread given to him or her.

And it was not only in great things she shewed her love of him, his smallest recommendation was sacred in her eyes. We have an example of this in her asking her Abbess, while still a subject, to choose a book for her to read every Lent, because he says that during that holy time "each one shall receive a book from the Library and read it all through in order." It is evident

that this point of the Rule was overlooked at St. Jerome's, but the faithful child of St. Benedict noticed and observed it. As she had been when a subject, so she was as Superior, as in little things, so in great, striving that the Rule might be fully observed, and its spirit kept.

"Oh Father Benedict have pity on me and help me, as indeed you can, for the love of God," was surely not her exclamation on one occasion only, but the cry of her heart during her whole life, and we cannot doubt that the Father, invoked with so much confidence, answered with many graces.

Her great charity towards the poor met with the reward her virtues usually received, for her enemies, some unhappily of her own community, formally complained of her generosity. It is wonderful that those who enjoyed the result of her labours in freeing the Monastery from debt, repairing it, and providing everything for the religious as had never been done before, should have been so blind as not to recognise how much she had accomplished, even in temporal matters, for the house. The result of the complaint was Joanna's complete justification, and encouragement was given her to go on as she had been doing. Groundless as the accusation had been, she must yet have felt bitterly the ingratitude of her sisters and their want of appreciation of her efforts for their good.

God took upon Himself His servant's honour, and shewed His displeasure at the persecution

against her. One of those who were most troublesome and who had boasted that she would do yet more against Joanna and those devoted to her, died most unexpectedly and without the last Sacraments. Happily she was not a nun but a secular of Bassano. The holy Superior mourned over this death and prayed for the soul for many a year.

Death was to come still nearer to Joanna and was to separate her from one whom she had loved with a deep filial love, and whom she revered for his piety. Her father fell ill after he had had the joy of seeing his daughter's virtue recognised, and her work as Abbess succeeding. Years before at the time of his conversion she had put B. John Colombini before him as a model, and, as if endowed with special light, had impressed upon him that after living a worldly life the blessed man had in thirteen years become a saint. Since then, just thirteen years had passed, and during them John Bonomo had striven after sanctity with no ordinary courage, and with no ordinary result. His spirit of prayer, his charity towards the poor, his ready forgiveness of injuries, were remarkable, and, in his case, the more admirable as they were the result of heroic efforts over his natural character, and the triumph of principle over feeling.

On the 18th of December of this year, 1652, Joanna received a revelation that he would soon be called away from this world, and from that time she frequently wrote to him letters full of pious thoughts and holy counsel, suggesting aspirations to him, and

encouraging him to bear the illness which had declared itself. One of these little prayers is the following : *In te dulcissime Jesu, in vulnere lateris tui, in corde tuo mitissimo, et sub pallio benignissimæ Matris tuæ dormiam et requiescam.* Referring to his sufferings and approaching death she writes : *Modica passio gloria infinita, and Beati qui parati sunt occurrere illi.* In one of the last letters she commences with the words : *Si inveneritis dilectum meum, nuntietis ei quia amore langueo.* Was not this a message entrusted to the dying father that he might take it to her Beloved with Whom she longed to be?

One Friday morning early in 1653, Joanna, having communicated was lost in prayer, and it was given to her to know that her father was in his agony. Immediately she offered anew to God the Passion and Death of His Son, and the sufferings, prayers, and good works of the dying man; then she accompanied him in spirit to judgment, which was one of the greatest and most marvellous mercy.

Then the soul was consigned to Joanna who bore it towards heaven, but on the way she had to stay in a place where there was no fire nor other pain, but a certain darkness and sense of imprisonment, all the more painful from a longing desire to continue the way to heaven. Although, counting by our time, they remained there but half an hour, yet its duration appeared to them quite twenty four hours. After this Our Lord allowed them to go on

their way, and in a moment, as it seemed, they were at the gates of Paradise. The soul of John Bonomo no longer able to contain itself at having reached its goal, poured forth thanks to God and to its conductor whom he blessed, and was then introduced into the company of the Saints. Joanna afterwards said that the delay was in punishment of a certain hardness of manner that he had sometimes shown, and she added that she had been privileged to be his guide from earth to heaven, because of the confidence he had placed in her, and because they had suffered together on one occasion. This was, no doubt, a reference to the trials she had gone through on account of the Bishop's mode of action.

John Bonomo was laid to rest in the cathedral of Vicenza, before the Altar of St. Charles, amongst the Brothers of the Oratory of St. Jerome.

By his Will, opened on the 7th of March 1653 and signed in 1647 he left, besides some legacies to the parish Church of St. Mark at Canove, an estate called Balbarecche, to produce an income for the nuns of St. Jerome's.

In the charities outside the Monastery which she could now carry on more generously on account of her father's legacy Joanna found a faithful helper in the steward Antonio Volpe, who had been at this time twenty-eight years in the service of the community. She could trust him to deliver her gifts whether of money, clothing, or food with tact and delicacy to those who are called the *pauvres honteux*. He was not however the bearer of favours to

others only, but was to receive them also for his own family. One of his sons was named Benedict, most probably on account of his father's devotion to the great Patriarch whose Rule was followed by his employers, and Joanna, much interested in the boy, exerted herself to give him every help in his studies in order that he might prosecute them with success, and she did not forget, in her motherly thoughtfulness, little details such as paper, pens, books, etc. As time went on she became more anxious about his future, and tried to interest her friends in him, as his desire was to become a priest. His talents were small but good-will was not wanting, and through the efforts of the holy Abbess he was sent to Padua to pursue his studies. It is touching to see how she provided for him, and how confidently he wrote to her. He was in want at one time of some furniture, and she immediately wrote to the Countess Buzzacarini asking her to send it, and telling her she would find the very thing wanted in a certain unoccupied room in her house. This is not the last we shall hear of this young cleric.

If even persons outside the Monastery were the objects of her tender care, how much more so were not those who were directly confided to her? Amongst these, the lay-sisters had a conspicuous place. Their perfection first, their comfort, consistent with monastic observance, next, were subjects of importance to her. Some of her miracles were worked for them, and it may be remembered how

in 1636 she had brought Sister Susanna back to life. This sister's devotion to her had increased with time, and in 1662 we hear of another interposition of Joanna in her behalf.

Ever after that terrible day on which she had been struck by lightning, the Sister had a great horror of storms. On the 9th of May a furious tempest broke out, and Sister Susanna ran to the cell of Dame Joanna begging her to do something to calm the weather. Humble as the Saint was, she gladly profited by this opportunity to manifest the sanctity of a Capuchin Father lately deceased, in great repute of holiness, and, fastening a piece of his habit to a stick, she put it out of the window, saying : " Oh Father if you are the great servant of God I believe you to be, obtain the cessation of this storm." Immediately the weather became calm, in answer, doubtless, to the prayers of one and the other.

This Capuchin was that Father George of Venice, already mentioned as being confessor of the community many years before. He died at Bassano on Saturday May the 2nd 1662, but a report of his death had reached the nuns before he was really deceased. Joanna deeply affected by the news retired to her cell to pray, and whilst thus engaged she seemed to behold in a lightning flash, the Father on his bed dying, but not yet dead as the report had stated. His face was brilliant with light and it seemed to her as if Our Lord, His holy Mother, and many angels were round the bed.

Our Lord bent down to embrace him, and at that moment the happy soul left the body and went to take its place among the choir of Seraphim. All this happened in one moment, and as the vision faded away the tolling of the bell at the Capuchin Monastery announced the passing of Father George's soul. Joanna was at this time ill of a fever, whose lingering and persistent character is well known to those who live in Italy. The night after the death of the holy Capuchin she became worse, but during the day a piece of his habit was brought to her, and on pressing it to her breast she was immediately cured.

To return to the subject of Joanna's affection for the lay-sisters. There was one called Justina Baroncelli who was much loved and esteemed by her on account of virtues which, nevertheless, were tarnished by one fault of character; her temper was so hasty that very little sufficed to arouse it. Although Joanna had done her best to help her against this failing, it seemed as if repeated resolutions had led to no practical result; but at last something happened which gave her an unexpected lesson. One morning when the nuns were all in choir reciting matins, Sister Justina was about her duty in the kitchen, and her temper being irritated by some trifle, she gave way to it as usual. At that very moment she saw an enormous dog pass near her, of so terrible an appearance that she involuntarily made the sign of the Cross; and she was still trembling with fear, when Joanna, then

Abbess, came into the kitchen and addressed her in these words : “ Ah, Sister Justina, how many times have I not told you to overcome your temper? Sometime or other, the devil will take advantage of it.” The lay-sister then told her what had happened, and Joanna added : “ Learn, then, to be patient.” She did learn, and Joanna not long after worked a miracle on her behalf.

One morning the sister inadvertently swallowed a pin she had put in her mouth; she ran to tell Joanna, who, at first scolded her for her carelessness, saying : “ If you were not such a goose, this would not have happened to you,” and then added : “ All the same, go into the Chapel of our Lady of Loreto and say a Hail Mary, whilst I also pray to God to deliver you from this suffering, and from worse which may come from it.” Having said her *Ave*. Justina bent down to kiss the ground, and as she did so, the pin fell out of her mouth.

If Joanna loved those souls, who, like our Lord came not to be ministered to but to minister, she also loved the young children educated in the monastery school, for He had said : “ Suffer little children to come unto Me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” God gave her special lights to help them, and it is not surprising that her marvellous gifts should have been exercised for these young souls of whom the next generation would be formed, and on whose education of mind and heart so much depended.

Many anecdotes are given us on this subject by

Joanna's biographers, and no full idea of her life could be had without relating a few of the most interesting.

One day she met in the cloister three of these young girls who had just come from confession. Lucilla, the little Contessina Pagello, her niece, who was one of these, was sweeping, and she said to her : " My dear child, you are sweeping now as badly as you swept and washed your conscience in confession"; the child understood, and went back to her confessor to make a more exact accusation.

When she was no longer abbess and the smothered enmity could again manifest itself Joanna was made to suffer much on account of the school children's affection for her. Dame Brigid Omaccini was their mistress, and she had joined the party adverse to the servant of God; consequently she always strove to prevent any communication or demonstration of affection. Careless of the reserve that respect for herself and her community should have instinctively taught her, Dame Brigid so far forgot herself as to say to one of the pupils, who frequently tried to see Joanna, that if she listened to her, she would soon be doing a thousand absurdities. The child repeated this to Joanna, whose only reply was given with a cheerful countenance : " My child, obey your mistress, love her with all your heart, and always respect her; what you have repeated to me is of no consequence." Some years after, this young girl became a nun, and attributed to Joanna the grace of her

consecration to God. This same pupil was in the habit of going with others to the choir after compline, in order that they might get the blessing of one whom they revered for her holiness. One evening Dame Teresa Fava had the imprudence to give way to her dislike and say in their hearing, "one fool makes a hundred"; Joanna could not pretend that she had not heard, so she turned to the children and said quietly : "My children I beg of you not to come to me any more, for we must not give occasion for murmuring."

Many of the children of the school became nuns in after years, amongst them was Dame Serafica Furetti, who, when the time for her profession came, was much troubled because she was aware that those who opposed Joanna would not vote for one so devoted to her. Joanna, however, bid her take courage and assured her that she would be elected. Serafica afterwards became a very excellent religious and was one of the witnesses whose testimony was cited for the beatification of the saint. Two of her nieces also became nuns after Joanna's death, and were all their lives very devout to her.

It is sad to have to record instances of childish animosity in a community of strict observance, and amongst souls really good and devoted to God. The only explanation is that they believed Joanna to be an impostor, and thought that all rules of charity might be put aside in her regard. God, too, desired to purify His servant, and how could

she have suffered persecution in her cloistered life, except from those who, like herself, were consecrated to God? Such examples are by no means rare in the lives of the saints: from the earliest times we find that the greatest trials have come to God's servants, not so much from the bad, as from the good.

Joanna's love for her state would naturally make her interested in those who desired to give themselves to God, yet we never find that this obscured her judgment. Many of those who, during the time of their education, had pronounced their firm intention of becoming nuns, had been told by their saintly friend that their intention would never be carried out. An example is given of one who was full of the idea of becoming a Capuchiness, but Joanna knew her character to be entirely unfitted for such a life; she therefore warned her saying: "Put away the idea, for you will never carry it out," adding, "neither will you become a nun in this house." This girl entered the novitiate, but failed to persevere, either under St. Francis' rule, or any other.

One day thirteen of the pupils asked Joanna which of them would become nuns at St. Jerome's. "Not one of you," she answered; and when pressed to say why, she replied, "because you are all small-minded and over sensitive": an answer which gives us some insight into the character required by her for a Benedictine. Nothing small, narrow, or cavilling; but breadth, generosity and largemindedness

can form a soul under the Rule of the great Founder of Western Monasticism.

Far from desiring merely to increase the number of those consecrating themselves to God, Joanna, with holy and enlightened zeal, wished to give Him only those whose vocation was real, and whose whole will went with their offering. There was a young lady whose father was determined she should become a nun; they lived at Padua, and a friend of Joanna's, the Marchesa Vidoni, wrote and told her what was being done, begging her to use her influence to prevent such an abuse of paternal authority. Her answer was to the effect that the young girl should pray earnestly and get others to join her that she might desire and do God's Will whatever it should be, so that He might be glorified, and her own soul sanctified. She then says that she herself is praying and will continue to do so, adding: "If after praying you do not feel moved to become a nun, put off any active steps as long as possible, meanwhile beg our Lord to give light to your father and to take from him this temptation, so that he may have grace to submit to the Divine Will." The advice of the servant of God was followed with success.

Before closing this subject of Joanna's love for her neighbour, especially for the young and the poor, it may be well to record the following use of one of her most remarkable gifts, that of bi-location.

At Murano, one of the Venetian Islands noted

for its beautiful glass manufacture, lived a poor man of great holiness named Francis Fornari, who gained his living by washing clothes : at the age of eighty this man gave testimony to the following fact at the process for the beatification of the servant of God.

He had never seen Joanna, when one day, whilst engaged in his ordinary occupation of washing linen, and lifting up his heart to God in prayer as was his wont, he suddenly beheld a nun raised about six or seven feet from the ground ; she spoke to him, and begged him to pray for her. The good man was so taken aback by this unexpected sight that he rose from the place where he was, and, fearing some delusion, replied that he did not understand such things and would not mix himself up with them. The nun then disappeared, and the next day Francis went to relate what had occurred to his confessor who was a Dominican friar at the monastery of SS. John and Paul in Venice. This Father was a great friend of Joanna's, and when he heard the poor man describe the subject of his vision, as a "short nun with a stick in her hand, a round face, smiling mouth, dressed in black, with white serge under-sleeves," he suspected that it was she, all the more as at that time she constantly made use of a stick, her sufferings from sciatica making it difficult for her to walk. He asked his penitent if he would recognise her if he saw her, and he replied in the affirmative. Some days after the saint appeared to him again, this

time accompanied by a gentleman whom she recommended very earnestly to the prayers of this humble servant of God. Francis informed his confessor of this second appearance, and the latter resolved to prove if his surmise was correct. They, therefore, set out for Bassano, and were scarcely inside the convent parlour when Dame Joanna entered the room. Francis immediately turned to some companions who were with him and said: "this is the nun who appeared to me," then addressing her, he added, "blessed Mother, do not give me such surprises another time," she smiled and said she had not done it of herself but by Divine permission, as she was in need of his prayers.

To novices, lay-sisters, children, the poor, and saints in humble life we might add the charity of Joanna towards servants. It may be remembered that examples of this have already been given, but as the following anecdote happened about this time it naturally finds a place here.

Lavinia Concetto, Countess Scroffa's maid, was accompanying her mistress from Venice to Bassano, when she broke her leg in an accident to the carriage in which they travelled. On her arrival she was at once put to bed in the guest-house of the monastery, and a doctor was sent for. He examined the limb, set it, and told her that although he by no means despaired of her cure, yet she would have to be patient and rest the injured leg for six weeks or more, otherwise he could not answer for the

result. Joanna felt very much for the suffering of the poor servant and the long time of inaction, all the harder to bear because of her accustomed life of activity; she sent Lavinia certain bandages with a message that she was to bind them round her leg. The servant obeyed and the next day rose perfectly cured and without the slightest further result from her accident.

Count Luigi Porto was in the habit of constantly seeing and talking to Joanna on the interests of his eternal salvation. On the occasion of one of his visits to the convent, his valet, Giambattista Vinoli, accompanied him to Bassano; this man had never seen the saint of whom he had heard great things, and could hardly believe that such a grace was possible. One day, however, when his master and some other gentlemen had been talking to her in the parlour he had to go in; she immediately bade him welcome with the greatest frankness, and looking up he saw a nun wearing a black veil, standing at the grating. Her tranquil, saintly face and air convinced him that it was Joanna; he saluted her as he best knew how, and then begged for a little corner in her prayers. She replied: "Listen, Giambattista,"—all present marvelled to hear her call him by his name, as she had never seen him before.—"I, such as I am, will not fail to pray for you: as for you, when God calls you do not be deaf to His voice." These words fell very unexpectedly on the ears of the servant, but they sank into his heart, and he began to wonder if

there were not a higher service than that of his master the Count. He left Bassano determined to become a religious, and on his return to Vicenza lost no time in asking the Capuchin Friars to receive him. They refused, thinking it best for him not to remain where he had been living as a secular, he, therefore, went to the Theatines at San Stefano, who admitted him into their Order. Before entering, he sold all he possessed and gave the proceeds to the poor, thus literally carrying out our Lord's words—"Go and sell all that thou hast and give to the poor, and then come and follow Me.—"

CHAPTER XI.

(1653 — 1658.)

Connection and influence over people and events in the world. Foreknowledge of monastic and sacerdotal vocations. Yearly visit to della Misericordia. Ecstasies.



ONE of the most wonderful features of Joanna's life was her connection with and influence over people and events in the world, and we marvel at the chaos of suffering, politics and crime in which the peaceful, cloistered daughter of St. Benedict was frequently mixed up.

One of her great friends was a sister of Count Lioni, Abbot of St. Nicholas of Lissa already men-

tioned, who had married Count Buzzacarini. In 1647, her husband, to whom she was deeply attached, was assassinated at Padua by an unknown enemy. The young widow could not forgive the murderer, and swore to seek him out at any cost and have her revenge on him, and the sight of her fatherless children deepened her resolve. For years she nursed this thought and looked forward with satisfaction to the day when the blood of her husband's murderer should flow in just retribution for his crime. By the intervention of her brother, the Abbot, she made the acquaintance of Joanna and began to visit her. Little by little her desire for revenge was softened, and at length, through the prayers and entreaties of the servant of God, she made the sacrifice of her long cherished project and forgave her enemy.

About this time Joanna was concerned in a still more tragic event. The Marchesa Lucrezia Obizzo was found murdered in her bed at Padua on the morning of November 16th, 1654. The murderer, Attilio Pavenello, a great friend of the family, who had long cherished an unholy passion for her got access to the room during the night, unseen by anyone, and the unhappy woman had to choose between dishonour and death. The faithful and heroic wife was found in the morning lying in her own blood, her throat and hands frightfully cut. The assassin escaped at the time but eight years after, just as he was liberated from prison where torture had failed to exact a confession of his

crime, Ferdinand, the son of the Marchesa, a boy of fourteen, took his life.

The Marchesa had been in the habit of going to see Dame Joanna, and we can imagine the pain of the latter when the awful news of the murder reached her. It was soon, however, changed into joy, for she was allowed to see in Heaven the grand soul who had so nobly despised death to save the priceless treasure of her chastity, and who had that night gone straight to Heaven where she was received into great glory.

Another example of the lawlessness of these times occurred in 1656. Signora Brocchi came one day in great trouble of mind to tell Joanna that she had just heard of the violent, and apparently unprepared death of her cousin for whom she begged prayers. The servant of God bade her come back in a day or two. When her friend returned, she told her the minute circumstances of her cousin's death at a country inn and how he had been able to make an act of perfect contrition before he died: a few days later, the details she had given were verified on the arrival at Bassano of an official who had heard all the particulars, and had seen the place where the unfortunate man had been murdered.

The republic of Venice was in great difficulties at this time; the war with the Turks had lasted for over twenty years, and renewed attempts for peace had failed; vice and crime too were rampant. Considering that the enemies of the state were Turks

and that the war was of such long duration, it is not wonderful that religious were as deeply interested in what was passing, as the rest of their countrymen. Accordingly, we find one good Capuchin, Father Barnabas of Gambellara, anxious to make the war a sort of Crusade against the Turks, in which even those consecrated to God's service should take part. Others too, took up this idea, and Joanna was asked her opinion on the matter. She says in her answer that she had long heard the idea discussed of religious forming an army to fight against the Turks, but had always thought this was to be by spiritual arms; now finds she was mistaken. She expresses great amazement and would only advise with great hesitation that each one should do what God inspired, adding in language that reminds us of St. Hildegarde :

“If God inspires them, let them go joyfully, my beloved Father, for it may be that He wills to wash the face of His Bride, the Holy Church, in the blood of so many innocent souls, and happy and blessed would they be who were called to such a lot. I should certainly never have dared to propose such a thing, but now I cannot resist the attraction of the thought. If you will only put the idea more clearly before me, I shall be able to speak more definitely, in the meantime I shall not fail to pray and make everyone pray for this intention, and I recommend myself with all my heart to the holy prayers of you, my Father.”

Another Capuchin, Father James of Cadore,

brother of the Father General, went further. This friar was eminently practical, so he designed a ship large enough to carry a thousand men. He interested a rich secular of the noble house of Barbarigo in his project and went to Joanna to get her advice and prayers. She tried to dissuade him from his design telling him it would be a failure, but it was a case of convincing him against his will, and he persisted in carrying out his idea. The ship was built at an enormous expense and proved perfectly useless. He and Father Barnabas set out in it for the east but they very soon returned to Venice without, it need hardly be said, having done any good for the cause. Joanna, in her delicate charity, wrote telling them that they had lost nothing before God who looks to the efforts made for His glory and not to their success. The year after, 1654, she wrote to Father James, saying that "God would, indeed, make use of him and his companions, not as they had imagined against the Turks, but against greater enemies, greater because they are heretics."

The project of an army consisting of friars was brought this year before the Roman Congregations, and in view of the exigencies of the times was approved. It never, however, came to anything, as the Duke of Terranova, the Spanish Ambassador to Rome, represented that the Franciscans being in possession of the holy places in Palestine, the fact of their bearing arms would probably lead to the loss of these places and the infliction of great cruelties

on the members of the Order in the east. These reasons might have had weight with the Franciscans proper, but the Capuchins had never been in the east, and therefore did not feel that prudence bound them to keep away, and amongst others who went were Fathers Barnabas and James. Joanna, knowing of their determination, wrote thus to the former: "That you and the good Cavalier Barbarigo will have the grace and crown of martyrdom seems clear to me; in the meantime, I promise you, such as I am, to have you always in my heart and to pray for you both. I recommend myself to your holy prayers, and I beg of you for the love of God to say one Mass for my unworthy self. Will you do this in passing Padua? Give every respectful message to Brother James of Cadore, and tell him that I recommend myself with all my heart to his holy prayers; and let no one doubt that, although it has pleased God to try your fidelity, you will work for His greater glory and your own gain,—I do not think you will have long to wait — and such as I am I will not fail to pray according to the intentions of you all."

Soon after the date of this letter Father Barnabas asked and obtained permission to go to Candia, where he spent six years in nursing the wounded, sick and dying, even going on the battlefield to re-animate the courage of the soldiers.

"After an engagement in which the Venetians were defeated, the Father was on the field all intent on succouring the wounded when he was

surprised by a Turk, who, with one stroke of his scimitar separated his head from his body and sent his soul into the presence of God. Thus was the prophecy of the saint made good, as it had already been with regard to the good cavalier." So writes Father Fabio in his memoirs, and although he does not give the particulars of the good Cavalier's triumph, we see by his reference to him that in his case, also, the prophecy of the servant of God came true.

Regarding this war with the Turks, which lasted for twenty-five years, we may remark that a treaty of peace was at last signed on September 1669, when Crete was ceded to the Sultan. The war had cost the Venetians 106,000,000 of ducats.

Twenty years ago, for we are now in 1655, Joanna had for the first time after her Profession exercised her gift of prophecy, and had foretold to Dame Francesca Belli that her sister, Signora Laura Costa, should bear a son who would become a Capuchin of renown. This boy, after a life of dissipation, entered a Capuchin monastery to the surprise of everyone. In a very short time he made marvellous progress in sacred studies, became a great preacher and was sent to preach in many cities of Italy.

Joanna was much interested in another young man belonging to the Costa family, who, unlike most of that name, was poor. She resolved to educate Bartholomew for the priesthood; and sent to Padua for books for him and procured masters

and all necessaries for his studies. He, however, shewed at last such a decided disinclination for the ecclesiastical state that the holy Abbess exclaimed : " Well then, go your own way." He obeyed, thinking he would be happy and enjoy life, but giving evidence at the age of seventy at the process for the beatification of his benefactress, he acknowledged that his own way had led to much unhappiness.

Joanna had a great attraction towards those destined for the sacerdotal state, and it is related of her that in this year she spoke of four young men who were entering on their ecclesiastical career, declaring that two of them, Antonio Crema and Antonio Gabrielli, would be an honour to the Sanctuary, but that the others would give scandal to the people and die miserably; her prophecy was literally fulfilled.

These are a few instances out of many of this kind that are cited in the lives of Blessed Joanna, but her foreknowledge was as clear with regard to monastic as to sacerdotal vocations. Although we have already given examples of this, yet, one occurring this same year may well find a place here.

A young girl came to her one day in doubt as to whether she was called to the religious state, or to that of marriage; Joanna asked for time to recommend the matter to God and told her to return in a few days. Then she said to her very gravely : " God never interferes with the free will of anyone, so if you wish to marry you may

do so, but it is certain that if you do you will have a heavy cross to bear, and be very ill-treated by your husband." All happened as she had predicted; the girl chose to marry, and before her honeymoon was over found bitter cause to remember the prophecy.

Different was it with a novice in the monastery of St. Benedict at Mantua. Dom Antonio Provai had entered the noviceship in 1655 fully determined to embrace the monastic life. Temptations came, and it was feared he would prove unfaithful. His mother, especially, who greatly desired her son to become a monk, earnestly prayed for his perseverance. She naturally turned in her anxiety to her friend, the holy daughter of St. Benedict, whose power of prayer had been so often proved. "Such as I am," she replied, "I will not fail to pray for Dom Antonio, but do not fear, for he will persevere and make his profession." Her words were verified to the joy of the mother; Antonio became a good monk and died in the holy habit.

In July, 1655, there were fresh elections at St. Jerome's and Joanna was no longer Abbess. On the first day of August, she was elected Prioress and held that office for six years, being re-elected in 1658. About this time Cardinal Bragadino resigned his bishopric and retired to Rome where he died three years after. His feelings seemed to have changed for the better towards the servant of God, who was now left to the unrestricted zeal of the Vicar General, Monsignor Arrigoni. The

next Bishop was Monsignor Giambattisti Bressa who ruled his diocese only five years, and whose sentiments towards her were probably influenced by the Vicariate.

The Vicar General had assisted at the election of the new Prioress, and when he saw the votes, instead of publishing the result, he had contented himself with saying that a Prioress had been elected, but that he would ask the advice or ratification of the Bishop before naming her. Such an arbitrary proceeding which set aside the Rule and privileges of the community is hardly conceivable, all the more as he added that, if the Bishop did not ratify it, they must proceed to a new election. The greater part of the community was much upset at this mode of action; all knew that Joanna had been elected, and she herself could not pretend to be unaware of it. The electors in their indignation wanted to refer the matter to Rome and even to the secular Magistracy of Venice, feeling sure that Rome would give judgment in their favour against such an uncalled for act, and that Venice would give them the justice that is expected even in secular matters. The saint interposed, and so thorough was the teaching she had given her daughters, so spiritual were they, that it required little to make them follow her example of humility, obedience and subjection. But this did not interfere with the rights of their Rule and Statutes, and they asked her, duly elected as she was, at least to take her proper place in choir and refectory; but she

would not consent to do even this, and insisted on filling the last place.

At length the news came that the bishop approved of the election; her spiritual children indignant at the delay and at the doubt that had been expressed entreated Joanna not to accept the office, but to ask for another election which would prove yet again, how the majority loved, revered and trusted her. But true humility spoke in her answer: "My daughters would you wish me to be the cause of new troubles by not accepting?"

Joanna's view of the office of Prioress in a community under the Rule of St. Benedict was that the office did not so much imply superiority over others, as help to the Abbess. In a letter to a Benedictine nun at the monastery of St. Peter at Vicenza, who in October 1656 had been made Prioress, she advises lines of conduct which she no doubt followed herself. "*Omnia disponit suaviter et in ditione ejus cuncta sunt posita* . . . I congratulate the illustrious and Right Revnd Mother Abbess on the accomplishment of the Divine Will [she also had just been elected] and on the great opportunity she has, not only of making others walk in the way of perfection and strict observance, but of exercising herself in patience, charity, humility, compassion and mortification, for this I know is what the office means, and that one has not only to exercise these holy virtues, but to exercise them in no ordinary degree. Let her be sure they will be very useful to her and make her advance and profit much during

the time she is Abbess; for great occasions of practising them will never be wanting to her : happy will she be, if she make use of them, as I hope she will. And you also, my revered mother, you, in your office, will have to practise continually self-abnegation, humility and patience, and you must aim at doing so ; you must exercise charity, exact obedience, strict observance, prudence, subjection, and foster between yourself and the Abbess a trustful and sympathetic union.

It behoves the Mother Abbess to show this first; and then it is for you faithfully and with humble subjection to correspond with her wishes. So acting, as I know you will with divine assistance, you will both fulfil your charges with the greatest profit to yourselves, and to all the others; with satisfaction to all, pleasure to God and honour to the monastery, and with good example to the whole city. Thus will the Divine Will be fulfilled in you all, for as from it came your election, so I hope and believe that God's help will certainly be with you to the end."

A point she had much at heart was stricter observance in that monastery : "I am delighted to think that with such means there may be almost a reform, and that little by little our Lord will, as has always been my hope, bring your monastery to such a state that it may be an example of good observance and holy virtues to all the others, and a garden, so to speak, of delights to God Himself. Have courage; let all be done with sweetness,

charity, tact, patience, perseverance and discretion. Thus I trust you will by your patience be enabled, like the good leaders Moses and Aaron, to bring those souls out of danger and make them live as they are really obliged to do in order to gain eternal life—the true end of the divine promise.”

Towards the end of her letter Joanna speaks of some of the members of that community at Vicenza in words that show the sisterly feeling prevailing between the two monasteries: “I understand that Dame Mary Celeste is very ill, this is a great grief to me, and I beg of you to give her my respectful salutations and tell her that I, such as I am, have never forgotten and never will forget to pray for her, or to fulfil what I promised, in life or death. Tell her how much I, such as I am, think of her; and how happy she may be that God does her the great grace of purifying her first with so many pains and indispositions, and then taking her to Himself at the time of such a jubilee.¹ Happy is she for although in life she suffers temptations and other trials she will not be left by God to the power of the enemy at the last, but will, I hope, be helped by God with His grace, and peacefully pass to eternal repose. Oh happy she! I pray God of His goodness to console and comfort her, not to abandon, but assist her in His loving kindness together with most holy Mary, the Angels and her patron saints; this I hope, and I, such as I am, will ever have her

¹ This evidently shows that a jubilee had been granted by the Pope during this year.

in my heart, and trust she will exchange this life of sorrows for an eternity of joy. I beg you also to remember me respectfully to Dame Eleonora and to console her, as well as my other beloved ones in God in my name. A thousand times I send my respectful reverence to the Right Revnd Mother Abbess of whose election I was sure; and such as I am I will always pray for her, but especially this year that she may do what God elected her to do; with all my heart I recommend myself to her holy prayers. I will pray for you also my beloved daughter in Christ, that you may perform your office better than I do, and with all perfection possible. The same salutations I heartily send to my beloved Dame Octavia Camilla whom I always remember, nor will I ever forget your family, [they both belonged to the Scrofa family]. Especially remember me to Dame Flaminia Isabella, Dame Placida and all the others. I ask you as a favour and for the love of God to send me thirty or forty of those little books on the Passion, and to tell me the price and my sister will pay the bookseller; forgive me the trouble I am giving you. Thank God I am much better in health than I deserve. I beg you to recommend me to the holy prayers of our Benedictine Fathers and to all good souls serving God."

The constant repetition of the words "such as I am" in Joanna's letters is, perhaps, rather wearisome, but let us remember that it came from the deep consciousness she had of her own unworthiness,

and her fear lest others might think highly of her, and value her prayers and good wishes unduly. It was no affectation, no mere form, but the expression of a heart that felt the creature was nothing, except when united to the Creator. This conviction found expression in constantly repeated: "I trust that by the most Precious Blood of Jesus Christ I shall obtain eternal life." The great favours God had shown her, the great graces He had given her, far from exalting had humbled her, because she realised how immeasurably they added to her responsibility. For this reason she felt so deeply the duties, not only of her state, but of the offices she filled, and desired time for extra prayer, that she might draw down graces on the fulfilling of them. When she was Prioress she spent every available moment in prayer, and one of her favourite places of retirement was the little chapel in the monastery dedicated to our Lady of Loreto.

Once a year, on the anniversary of her Profession, she was accustomed to visit the Church called *della Misericordia* which was near the monastery, and where the Feast of the Nativity was observed with special devotion. The Church joined a corner of the nuns' garden, and there was a window which looked into it. This would easily be understood by anyone who has visited San Gimignano, where St. Fina, that sweetest of Benedictine Oblates, lived and died. There is in the town a community of Vallombrosian nuns who have lived in that same spot for nigh six hundred years. Their convent

and church are on one side of the road, and a covered bridge leads from their garden to a church on the other side dedicated to San Jacopo. From a tribune they can assist at the Masses celebrated there, and can go to the garden beyond.

In 1656 the picture of our Lady in the *Misericordia* at Bassano was to be crowned and all the people in the place flocked to see the ceremony: the community of St. Jerome's were also present. Dame Joanna, full of devotion to our Lady, and thinking, as we cannot doubt, of the grace of her own consecration, was suddenly rapt in ecstasy and raised from the ground for so long, that there was time for those not present at the moment to come and see her, as, unconscious of all around, she was in the contemplation of mysteries which others believed, but she realised. Impressed as were the nuns at the time, there were not wanting those who could say afterwards that it was all imposture, and, yet, they confessed that her actions were beyond condemnation; "they were even good and holy, and that she observed the laws of God, ecclesiastical discipline, and the Rule of her Order."

In 1657 Father Vecher, a Jesuit, went to Bassano to ask leave to visit the holy Benedictine whose life of marvellous sanctity was in everyone's mouth. This year had been a remarkable one for the Republic of Venice. Fifty years before, Pope Paul V. issued two Briefs commanding the Republic to abstain from interfering in ecclesiastical matters; as it refused to obey, some of the

Religious Orders left the Venetian States—amongst them, the Jesuits. Soon after, a treaty was concluded between the Senate and the Holy See, and some Orders returned but exception was made against the Society, and it was only now that its members were, owing to the efforts of Pope Alexander VII. and Louis XIV. of France, then a young man, allowed to return. It is curious to remark that the prime mover in bringing about this act of justice was a great friend of Dame Joanna, Giovanni Pessari, one of the senators.

A quaint and touching description is given us of her meeting with Father Vecher. Her old doubts and difficulties had returned, partly, perhaps, because others doubted, and she asked to go to Confession to one of whose sanctity she had heard so much. She told him how fearful she was of being deceived, and entreated him with tears to beg our Lord to remove her doubts. On saying this, both she and the confessor were rapt in ecstasy and received internal assurance that, far from being deceived, Joanna was the recipient of unusual graces from God. So great a consolation did this prove to her that from that time she was relieved from such fears. An old biographer adds that they remained for nine or ten hours in conversation, communicating to each other the lights God had given them. The good Jesuit went away exclaiming, "Oh what a saint! what a saint! what a saint!" There is no doubt as to Joanna's opinion of him, and afterwards we find them in

constant correspondence. He was a faithful witness during the process for her beatification.

The absorption in God of her whole being was so common to Joanna, that even the children in the school were well aware of, and often witnessed, it : two instances occurred in 1658. Clara Roberti relates the circumstances :

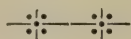
“I saw her with my own eyes in ecstasy in the choir. It was about the time of the *Ave Maria*, and I and Lucilla Pagello of Venice [the saint's niece] went down to the choir to gain an indulgence; we knelt on either side of the servant of God, who had her hands joined and her face lifted up to heaven. We called her by name and asked her to pray for us, but she did not answer as she used to do at other times; we touched her with our hands and kissed her, but she made no movement and was fixed and immovable as a statue. A short time after we went away, for when she had these ecstasies she was greatly mortified if she found that anyone had noticed her.”

A young girl, who afterwards became a Capuchiness, related that she often went through devotion to pray near the servant of God, and several times found her in ecstasy and quite motionless. Once from curiosity she wanted to touch her but the nuns prevented her saying “stop, do not touch her.”

These graces did not prevent Joanna from doing all her duties, as well as assisting the monastery by the work of her hands. It may be remembered

that she had a great talent for Church work, embroidery and such things. The prohibition of going to the parlour and writing letters had never been entirely removed, and Joanna's delicacy of conscience made her look on it as obligatory, even when Prioress; she was thus unable to fulfil many duties of her office, and, therefore, had more time to devote to work. Making artificial flowers for the church was a favourite occupation, especially when they were to go to some shrine, and we find her writing: "I am sending you some materials, and later I will send the lemons. I beg you will get the pieces dyed pink, and others, if you can, the colour of carnation and some green. I have been told to make flowers for sale because as my time may not be occupied like other Prioresses in going to the parlour, I must do some other work, but I do it only for orders given by persons who most frequently belong to the country families. I have no materials and do not know what to do, and, therefore, appeal to your charity."

In this way she gained money for the monastery, and her work, especially embroidery for vestments, was much sought after. Some of those she worked are still at Bassano, and one beautifully embroidered veil covered the body after death, which had been so mortified in life.



CHAPTER XII.

(1658 — 1663.)

Great favours vouchsafed to her from God.
 Triennial election to different offices.
 Countess Buzzacarini and her brother.



ON the octave day of the Feast of St. Benedict 1658, Cardinal Bragadino died at Rome and was buried in the Church of St. Mark,¹ and the following year his former Vicar General, Monsignor Lauro died.

Joanna had never allowed her feelings to get the better of her with regard to those who had been the instruments of so many of her trials and sufferings. On the contrary, she had always tried to excuse them and to attribute well-intentioned motives,

¹ In the church of San Marco at Rome his tomb still exists in the left aisle not far from the door. It is handsome as renaissance style goes, and a bust of the Cardinal with the usual imperial that gives so worldly an air to its wearer perpetuates his features. Unbidden the thought rises that a man of this appearance could hardly have understood a saint. The inscription is as follows :

D. O. M.

Marco Antonio Bragadino hujus Ecclesiæ Titulari munifico, | quem Urbanus Octavus | ut avi a Itircis excoriati merita in nepote dignissimo pensaret | purpura decoravit | per eremen Ceneten ac Vicentini gradus ad supremi episcopatus fastigium | ingentibus suis virtutibus properantem mors stitit et suæ anno LXVIII salut hum M.DCLVIII | Jo. Aloysius frater et Marcus nepos Patric. Ven. P. P.

even to mistaken acts. She now prayed much and earnestly for the soul of the Cardinal, and one day he appeared to her, thanked her for her suffrages and told her that owing to them he was about to enter into the joy of his Lord.

A sister died this year in the monastery, whose reception of the last Sacraments was due to Joanna's prevision. Dame Laura Maria Furetti thus relates the fact: "One of our religious, Sister Benedict Mary Barbieri, suffered often from very severe pain in the head accompanied by fever which generally lasted some days. One night when as usual this came on, the nuns, knowing she always recovered, were not a little scornful when Joanna had the confessor called in haste; their feelings altered when the sister expired soon after receiving the last Sacraments."

But Joanna more often worked cures than prepared people for death. There was a Minor Observantine, Father Paschal Longino of Padua, who suffered such intense pain in his right arm that he could not lift the chalice at Mass, nor make the sign of the cross. No remedy having effect he asked Joanna to pray for him; at the same time one of his spiritual children gave him a little picture of our Lady painted by the servant of God, and the mere application of it to his arm suddenly and completely cured it.

Another very similar instance is given of a Venetian lady who became very ill, and was soon, as it seemed, in her last agony. She had already

lost all power of speech when Joanna sent her one of these little pictures directing that it was to be laid on the sick woman's breast; this was done, the rattle in her throat ceased, her voice returned and in a few hours she was quite well.

In the year 1660 Monsignor Curiani, a Venetian noble, after having governed Terni, Tessi, Montalto and other places in the Papal States, was promoted to the See of Vicenza, although only thirty years of age. He in some respects reversed the order of things with regard to Joanna, for the constant petitions made to the Curia for leave to see and speak to her necessitated a return to the usual freedom allowed to the other nuns. This permission, however, seems only to have been given towards the very end of the year, for in December Don Girolamo Celsi, a priest who much wished to confer with her, was obliged to have recourse to the Curia in order to do so. He had been in Basano some months before and one morning went to St. Jerome's to say Mass, but as he was unknown and had not brought his papers he was refused permission; Joanna happened to see him and felt sure she had seen him before. When Don Girolamo saw her in December he referred to his visit in August when he had been refused leave to say Mass, and asked her if she had seen him then. She told him she had, and that it was not the first time; as he pressed her to tell him where she had seen him before, she related how it had been. Having always had a great devotion to St. Teresa, "Our

Lord," says Don Girolamo, "gave her the grace of assisting in spirit at the Divine Office in the Church of the discalced Carmelites at Venice, and about a year ago she observed that I was among the communicants." This was a fact, for, recovering from an illness, and unable to say Mass, he had gone to this church for Communion.

But the greater the favours vouchsafed to Dame Joanna from God, the more did the prejudice of the Curia against her increase. Dom Leo Bracco says: "It had become possessed by a feeling so unfavourable to her, that the opinions of learned theologians and consultors could not shake it, any more than the experience of her spirit which men such as Father Joseph da Lionnessa, Father John Sale, and Father Sebastian Vecher, had." "It is then no wonder," adds Dom Leo, "that the bishop, Monsignor Ciurani, a man of the law, with little knowledge of theology, should understand nothing of her spirit, and should follow the example of his illustrious predecessor, who allowed himself to be carried away in opposing her."

In 1661 the triennial election to the different offices came round again, and the bishop, after his visitation of the monastery, assisted at the election. Joanna's second term as Prioress was over, and many wished to make her Abbess again. At the first scrutiny it was found she had sufficient votes, but his Lordship made some excuse for having the voting repeated. The result was the same, but again he annulled the election; this was repeated

no less than nine times. How much longer this contest between the rights of the nuns and the will of the bishop might have continued, we cannot tell, but at this juncture Joanna interfered and said she would not accept the office. "See," he exclaimed, "Dame Joanna will not accept it, and yet you try to force it upon her! No, choose another." All that day and evening until long after dark did the contest last; the greater number would vote for no one else; at last, worn out with fatigue, they gave in and selected another. Comment upon this would be superfluous. At these famous elections Dame Brigid Omaccini had been made Infirmarian; she was one of Joanna's enemies, and, certainly, no perfect nun as we have already seen and shall see more clearly by what follows. In 1662 Dame Pellegrina Costa had a bad attack of asthma accompanied by constant fever, the doctor's verdict after seeing her was short and decided, "this religious will die of consumption." Dame Brigid waited to hear no more, but went straight to the patient and repeated the doctor's words without any circumlocution. Those who know the dread Italians have of consumption will understand the cruelty of this, all the more as she followed it up with saying: "I will nurse you no longer," and leaving the room she left her poor patient sobbing on her bed. Dame Joanna happening to go into the infirmary, Dame Pellegrina related to her what had passed adding "the infirmarian has refused to nurse me any longer, and,

still worse, she has told me I am in consumption and will die of this illness." "My child," replied Joanna, "be comforted, for you are not in consumption and will never die of it, neither will you die of this illness, but Dame Brigid, who has abandoned her charge, will herself die of consumption." A solemn prophecy for the poor cowardly soul devoid of all monastic virtue, who had not only fled from her duty but had so cruelly frightened and wounded her sister. At this time Dame Brigid was the picture of robust health and only twenty-six years of age. None of her family had ever been consumptive, nothing could have seemed more unlikely than the fulfilment of the prediction, and, yet, as we shall see, Joanna had made a true announcement.

That same year Dame Maura Fossa, one of her greatest antagonists, became ill and was nursed with the most loving care by the saint, who used to go regularly to see her before matins and would try to tempt her appetite with little dainties. At last she died tended by Joanna to the end. For eight years did the latter continue to pray for her, and it was only then that the soul of Dame Maura was admitted into the joys of Heaven. Her sister, Dame Scholastica, must surely have been touched and changed by the tender forgivingness shown by the saint, and, indeed, we find that she and Dame Justina Navarrini were less contrary to her afterwards. It would seem that Dame Teresa Fava alone remained inimical to the saint even till her death.

Dame Joanna loved her community and everything connected with it, and we find proof of this in a letter dated 27th April, 1662. It has reference to an accusation made by some persons outside, against the steward of the monastery, and, although of no great importance it was sufficient to call forth protest. "Everything has been done to prove to them that he knows nothing about it, and this is perfectly true, for God forbid that he should do such a thing, and, yet, they insist on saying he did. It seems strange to us all that such dishonour should be done to our monastery, for our steward has been with us twenty-eight years and has never been guilty of the slightest unfaithfulness, nor given us trouble in any way." These remonstrances had their effect and one is almost glad of the momentary anxiety which was the occasion of the indignant letter, at the honour of the monastery being impugned by doubts thrown on the character of the servant who had worked for it twenty-eight years.

In 1663 the limitations laid on Joanna with regard to communication with externs were fully and entirely withdrawn, and in future she depended like all the other nuns solely on the permission of the Abbess. The prohibition to write letters had lain upon her more or less for fifteen years, and for about twelve years she had been forbidden to go to the parlour, though, towards the end of that time exceptions had frequently been made. Permission had actually to be obtained from the Curia when an exception was desired to the general rule the

bishop had made, and after the saint's death many written licenses to see people were found in her cell.

Many a time during those years some of the nuns had entreated her to have recourse to Rome against the bishop, but her answer invariably was : " My daughters, teach me to pray, and not to disobey those who stand in the place of God."

Countess Buzzacarini and her brother have been already mentioned as greatly attached to Joanna. In 1664 they went to Bassano to see her, principally to obtain the cure of the Abbot, who was suffering so severely from dizziness that he could only walk leaning on the arm of his servant, and could not take a step without his help. He was convinced that if he could obtain Joanna's blessing he would be cured. Accordingly, he went with his sister to the parlour, and after considerable time had been spent in spiritual conversation he asked for her blessing. She excused herself, then refused and turned the subject, but all to no purpose the Abbot persisted; " I will have it " he said, and his sister joined her entreaties to his, so that Joanna was silenced. Then lifting up her hands and eyes to heaven she said : " O most blessed Virgin Mary, the desired blessing may come from thee." The grace thus asked was instantaneously given, for the Abbot as he rose to leave found himself completely cured. He was ever afterwards able to walk easily and quickly, so much so that the doctor attested the cure as miraculous.

CHAPTER XIII.

(1663 — 1669.)

Triennial election. Rain floods the country. Visits from persons of distinction. Triennial election. Joanna beholds a soul released from purgatory by her prayers. She provides for the steward's son.



ON the 15th November, 1664, the nuns again assembled for new elections to the different offices of the monastery. Joanna was elected Abbess by a great majority of votes, and it would appear that no persistent opposition was made by the bishop.

Enough has been said in a former chapter as to her method of government and it will be better now to refer to her education of the nuns in the spiritual life. Dom Leo Bracco tells us how it was founded on deep devotion "to the most Holy Trinity and the humble abasement of the soul before its Majesty. She taught that all one is and does should be offered up for the honour and glory of God, the end of a Benedictine life being that He may be glorified in all things; that living for Him, all good and every grace may be hoped for, above all the grace of serving Him faithfully in the midst of trial and temptation." Here we cannot but reflect that the new Abbess taught what she indeed exemplified in herself. Feeling she could give them no greater help to practise this interior life, than the heartfelt

recitation of the Divine Office, she wrote with her own hand a method for saying it profitably.

Faith was the favourite subject of her instructions, and those who heard her marvelled at the persistence with which she returned to it. Whenever the nuns came to her with their troubles or temptations, she would say : " Be constant in faith." Sometimes when it almost seemed that she did not answer to the point, they said to her : " But Mother I was not speaking of faith." Then she would try to show them how faith is the panacea of all spiritual troubles and that it suffices to act always from a spirit of faith to surmount all difficulties, and she would add that without faith in God everything is vain.

In the process for the Beatification of this holy Abbess her faith was said to have been " so great and so strong that she alone in the community appeared to be a catholic."

She insisted that the foundation of the spiritual life could be no other than the theological virtues, and that all the exercises of monastic life must be animated by them, for they alone dispose souls to God. Besides these principles on which she frequently insisted, Dame Joanna introduced some pious practices into the Community believing they would increase the spirit of piety. Amongst these were the Stations of the Cross, for her intense devotion to the Passion made her eagerly embrace for herself and others any means of honouring It. She also added that of the *Scala Santa*, and employed a great friend of hers, Cavalier Bassa-

donna, to obtain this privilege for the monastery. He had been ambassador to Spain, and was now envoy extraordinary to Clement IX., recently elected. In 1665 he procured a Brief which enabled them to have this grace with all its indulgences. The stairs were erected and the loving devotion of the servant of God suggested adorning them with her own hands with the emblems of the Passion.

She also gave expression to her devotion to the Passion by writing a little book entitled "Clock of the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, or the dolours and sorrowful way trodden for us sinners by our Lord Jesus Christ in His most bitter Passion." It contains a notice of the hours at which each step of the Passion occurred, and the distance from place to place.

Sorrow for the sins which caused the suffering of her Divine Lord impelled her to urge her nuns to a greater spirit of penance during carnival days in order to expiate the sins generally committed at Venice during that time, and one year she enforced extraordinary penances upon all on *Giovedì grasso*.

Yet Joanna was never narrow, and whilst insisting on a spirit of penance and exactness to the Rule to the extent of sending her cousin Dame Marietta to the Infirmary for her meals during Lent, because she was obliged to eat *lactinia*, she would readily dispense even with spiritual duties, when a sufficient reason made it advisable. For instance, one morning she sent three of the community away from meditation, because of some work which had to be

finished quickly. It was on this occasion that she afterwards called Dame Serafica Furetti and told her that she had expected to be employed in the work, and had inwardly resented not being chosen, taking it as a slight upon her abilities. Joanna added that she had purposely passed her over, in order to teach her humility.

A curious instance of the apparitions of which we have already had examples, occurred this year.

A young man named Vinciguerra Camposanpiero was very anxious to obtain the number of votes sufficient for being enrolled in the *Consiglio dei Nobili*, not only for the honour it was in itself, but also because it opened the way to many other distinctions. His father was one of his most violent opponents on account of dissensions in the family, and he feared he would not be elected. Now there lived at Padua one of those holy souls so common at that time, an old woman named Girolama of whom it was said that a saint appeared to her almost every night. Girolama was renowned for the power of her prayer, and her humble dwelling was frequented by many noble men and women of Venice who sought her counsel or intercession with God. Vinciguerra had recourse to her when the time for the voting was fixed, for things looked very unfavourable. One day she came to him and said Dame Joanna had sent him a message that nothing would be done on that day, and a little later he received a letter from her confirming this statement. In fact the council was put off and the

voting for Vinciguerra postponed till December 4th. In the meantime difficulties increased and there seemed little likelihood of success. The day came at last; and while the young man was at dinner, Girolama knocked at the door, and was at once admitted. She had come to say that the holy Abbess had appeared to her the night before and bade her tell him that the day would not pass without the fulfilment of his hopes. That same evening he received the intimation that he was elected by the votes of all those present at the council.

The year 1666 was a time of trouble, for heavy rain did immense harm to the land, and in some places the floods caused loss of life. This, coming after the long war with the Turks, terribly impoverished the country, and the next year the state of things was aggravated by a very severe earthquake, so that misery was spread throughout the Republic.

The sufferings of the poor were piteous, and it may be imagined how Joanna exerted herself in every way she could to relieve them, though the monastery appears to have been in greater straits than ever. Nevertheless, a long procession of poor people might have been seen daily wending its way to St. Jerome's, to receive at least sufficient food to support life, and very often an alms.

Joanna's compassion went very far, for after getting money from her in the parlour the poor people would often go round to the door, and try to

get more from the portress. When told of this, she only said: "Leave them alone poor things, and let the portress give them a little more." Clothes, too, were frequently distributed to those who had so little to wear that their rags could not deserve the name of covering. With reference to this giving of clothing, many persons asserted that the supply was miraculously multiplied, for, humanly speaking, it could not have gone so far as it did.

The monastery itself was in great poverty, and souls of less faith than Joanna began to fear that such extensive charity would reduce themselves to poverty as deep as that they were relieving.

The following fact reminds us of a similar one in St. Benedict's life and we cannot doubt that his spiritual daughter remembered the heroic charity recorded by St. Gregory when she insisted on her cellarer's obedience. One day when only very little vegetable food was left in the house, the abbess, who was loath to let the poor go away without anything, went to the cellarer, Dame Teresa Fava, and bid her have some soup made of whatever could be found. Dame Teresa, who, as we know, was not a submissive religious, replied with little respect: "If that is done, nothing will be left for us." Joanna listened with her accustomed gentleness and then said that they must trust in God, and that He would surely provide for those consecrated to Him. She had better have used severity than gentleness with Dame Teresa, who argued for an hour and only then consented to obey her superior. The

next day a great quantity of vegetables was sent to Dame Joanna as an alms and she took the opportunity of giving them herself to the refractory cellarer saying: "See what it is to show charity to the poor, when our Lord God has multiplied our provisions."

Nothing had any effect upon this poor nun and she continued to be a cross to her superior, even to the extent of outward disrespect and insolence. So unpardonable was her conduct one day that even the saint felt constrained to severely reprehend her, telling her, "that she must remember to whom she was speaking, that from respect to the office she held, she could be silent no longer, and that Dame Teresa must remember that she had to treat with her as her superior and not as with her personally." When Dame Teresa left her, Joanna began to examine herself on what had passed and accused herself of too much zeal. She had offended with her tongue, and with her tongue she would suffer, so she bit it so severely that the blood flowed from her mouth. Dame Pellegrina Costa happening to come in at the moment exclaimed in her surprise: "Mother what have you done?" The servant of God answered with great feeling: "I have chastised my tongue, because it was too zealous in correcting a religious."

Joanna was not weak, and she did not hesitate when reprehension was merited: an example of this is given which relates to Dame Gertrude Barbieri. This nun was one day laughing at a priest and inciting some of the nuns to do the same.

As soon as the Abbess heard of it she was very angry, saying that a priest ought to have as great respect paid to him as one's Angel Guardian. She called Dame Gertrude and gave her a public reproof and penance : " Do you not know," she said to her, " that whoever touches a priest, touches the apple of our Lord's eye?"

Yet Joanna herself certainly often had to exercise her great faith in order to reverence those ministers of God who so sorely tried her. At this very time the confessor of the community, Don Giambattista Freschi, was more inimical to her than anyone else had ever been. He held the office of pro-Vicar at Bassano for the Bishop of Vicenza, this gave him, he imagined, great power over the community, and he exercised it in ways which being inquired into at the process of the saint's Beatification, excited wonder at his arrogance and her humble patience.

In 1667 she thought well to raise a wall which was so low that seculars could overlook the monastic buildings, especially the infirmary part. The prudence and reasonableness of this were patent, but some persons outside complained to the pro-Vicar of what was being done. One would think that the very fact of their complaining would have shewn how necessary the change was; but on the contrary, he agreed with them, and going to the monastery sent for the Abbess whom he scolded, threatened and reproached. Not content with this, he actually went the length of making the workmen pull down the wall before his eyes.

Joanna felt acutely the indignity to her office, but, calm and self-possessed, allowed no sign of her feelings to appear. We are not told how this affair ended, but the language which one of Joanna's biographers uses with regard to the pro-Vicar is too strong to be translated into english.

Another time this same priest was in the confessional and Joanna knelt in her turn to make her confession. His resentment against her was so violent that he raised his voice high enough to be heard by those in the choir who could not help hearing what he said. Fool, hypocrite, arrogant, ambitious, were the mildest terms bestowed on her; the nuns full of confusion and indignation waited for her to come out of the confessional. When she came, they saw her looking as tranquil and even as joyful as though she had received great consolation. If she could thus humbly and joyfully take humiliations from one so bitterly prejudiced against her, it is little to be wondered at that in the following instance, she could receive it thankfully.

There was a certain priest, Don Francisco de Vicenzi, attached to the church of the most Holy Trinity in Venice, who had known Joanna for a long time by report and by correspondence, but who wished to know her personally. Two gentlemen Vinciguerra Camposampiero and Sortorio Osato accompanied him to the monastery, and all went to the parlour. No sooner had the servant of God entered than the priest turning to the two gentlemen said: "What do you think of this person? Just

look at her, has she not the face of a fool? She does as she likes, comes frequently to the parlour, and is full of spiritual ambition. She deceives the world, holding herself for a saint, and expects to gain the other world by her hypocrisies." The two gentlemen looked at each other speechless at such a greeting, but the holy nun threw herself on her knees and crossing her hands on her breast said to the priest: "May God ever bless you who reveal to me what I did not know!" And she kissed the ground.

Then Don Francisco went to say Mass at which Joanna assisted. When it was finished they went back to the parlour, and he asked her what graces God had given her during the Divine Sacrifice. She answered frankly: "God gave me this grace, dear Father, that when you elevated the Sacred Host I saw a Child surrounded with rays of light, who blessed me." After dinner the priest returned to the monastery and was told that he was wanted at the door. He went there and found the Abbess who threw herself on her knees at his feet, and taking his cassock kissed it with much humility, as if to show her gratitude for the humiliation he had given her.

He afterwards wrote an account of this visit, and headed it with these words: *Tibi laus, Tibi gloria, Tibi gratiarum actio in sæcula sempiterna, O Beata Trinitas.*

In proportion to her humility God made use of the saint as His instrument, and we cannot be surprised when we hear of great things being done

by one who was so little in her own eyes. The difficulty in writing such a life is the fear of overloading it with the supernatural events which were continually recurring, and yet choosing out sufficient to exemplify it.

Towards the end of the time of her being Abbess, a noble gentleman of Padua, Bartolomeo Miara, came to beg for her prayers on his second marriage. During thirty-three years of his married life, he, to his great grief, had had no children. And having married again, he trusted that the prayers of the Servant of God might obtain for him this happiness. Joanna modestly answered that she would remember his intention in her prayers and hoped he would have the consolation he desired. A short time after he visited her again, when she told him his wish would be granted, for she had presented it before the Supreme Tribunal of the most Holy Trinity and two things only were required to obtain the grace. One was that he should make a novena before a picture of our Lady which she gave him, the other, and the more important, that he should renounce a certain sin. He was surprised at being found out in what he supposed unknown, but made the promise and kept it. Two children were born to him in due time, but shortly after the birth of the second he forgot his promise and fell into the sin he had renounced: the judgment of God overtook him and the children died. Mad with grief he again had recourse to Joanna, who promised once more that his wishes should be fulfilled on the

same conditions as before. He agreed, and two more children came to gladden his life, and this time he faithfully kept his resolution.

A little before this, a young girl, Maria Forasceri of Bassano, had died; her father went to ask the prayers of the holy Abbess and enquired if she could tell him anything of the state of the departed soul. Joanna prayed and beheld the soul in Purgatory with a black garment on her shoulders, which prevented her from going to heaven, because it had not been paid for. She told the father who immediately took some money from his pocket to pay for it, but the servant of God told him it was not enough and mentioned the exact sum. As soon as the creditor was paid she saw the soul ascend to heaven.

The fame of Joanna's sanctity was spreading far and wide, and in 1667 Henrietta Maria Adelaide of Savoy having gone to Padua to visit the tomb of St. Anthony, hearing of the holy life of the Abbess of St. Jerome's, resolved to visit her before returning home with her husband, the Elector of Bavaria. She went to Bassano accompanied by a numerous suite, and arriving at the monastery was met at the door by the Abbess and all her nuns. The Duchess immediately knelt and humbly asked her blessing; Joanna, kneeling too, begged her to rise, declaring herself to be only a wretched sinner; but the princess declared she would not change her position until she had received a blessing. Joanna then lifting her eyes and hands to heaven said :

“ May the Lord God bless thee O great princess, since I, His servant, am unworthy to do so. “ The Princess then rose and begged her to bless the court there present. After much painful hesitation on the one part and insistance on the other, Joanna gave the blessing, all kneeling to receive it. After this they entered the monastery which Joanna was prepared to shew them, but the Princess said she had not come for that but only to converse on the affairs of her soul. Taking with her a young lady belonging to the court, she retired with Joanna to the little Chapel dedicated to our Lady of Loreto. There the Abbess and Princess began their conversation, but the young girl, seating herself behind the former, took out a pair of scissors and cut off a piece of her veil, and then left them to continue talking in private, Joanna, meanwhile, quite unconscious of what she had lost. One of the great sorrows of the Duchess’ life was her ill-health; and she felt intensely having no children. She entreated the saint to pray for her that God would grant her a child. Joanna answered by bidding her confide in God and resign herself to His Will, and then told her that within a short time she would recover her health and have a son. She left Joanna greatly consoled, and shewed her gratitude not only by words but by substantial gifts to the monastery. Shortly after the prophecy was fulfilled.

About this time a Benedictine Abbot from Moravia came to see Joanna. It is easy to imagine the joy she felt receiving so illustrious a member of

her own loved Order. No particulars of this visit have come down to us, but we shall see later that Joanna's fame passed beyond the Alps to various Benedictine communities who must have been happy in the thought of her holiness.

The years fled quickly, and again the time came round for the triennial elections. On November 27th, 1667, Dame Faustina Navarrini, one of those most opposed to Joanna, was elected Abbess, while the latter became Prioress for a third time. With all her heart she tried to help her Superior whom she both loved and respected, and without whose leave she would not do the slightest thing. Her time was fully occupied as, besides the ordinary duties of her office, she still looked after the poor for whom alms were constantly given her, and there was a continual concourse of people to the parlour, who came to see the "holy nun." Her holiness was enhanced by the brightness of her conversation, and many an anecdote shows how attractive it was, so that it is no wonder that she was sought after. God had given her not only the attraction of holiness but also that of intellect. One day a gentleman came to see her, accompanied by Dr. Baldo Baldi and a little girl called Margaret. In the course of conversation it chanced that the doctor remarked that the child must assuredly go to heaven for "the gate of paradise shines with pearls" referring to the third strophe of the hymn beginning in the Roman breviary: *Cælestis Urbs Jerusalem* but Joanna gracefully added the Bene-

dictine continuation, *et virtute meritorum illuc introducitur.*

Some years before the time of which we are now writing, a poor woman brought her little nephew to Bassano, hoping to have him cured by Joanna's prayers of scrofula in the neck. She had been induced to come by her sister a nun of St. Gothard, who had related to her the great graces obtained by the holy Benedictine. When told for what they had come Joanna, who was then Abbess, smiled and taking a reliquary fastened to her beads made the sign of the Cross over the child with it and blessed him; he returned home and in three days was perfectly cured. In 1668 he entered among the Capuchins and soon heard the joyful news that he was to receive the Habit. His aunt knowing the pleasure this would give to Joanna went to tell her of it. Signora Caterina Brocchi happened to be in the parlour at the time, and when the good woman had gone the servant of God turned to her and said: "Do you think that young man will be a Capuchin?" then added, "that he will never be, for in a short time he will die and enter the choir of the Franciscans."

Soon after the poor boy wounded his foot so severely in cutting wood that he died from the effects, and was buried in the choir of the Franciscans.

A new Community of *Dimesse* was founded in Venice about this time. Two of the foundresses were the noble Venetian lady Maddalena Mascarelli,

and Countess Clare Porto, both devoted friends of Joanna. The husband of the former had been a very bad man, but received the grace of dying penitent on account, it is believed, of a heroic act of forgiveness. He had a great enemy whom he vowed to kill, and one day when, with true Italian faith, he was saying his Rosary in the Dominican Church of S. Corona, he beheld the man before him. His unhesitating impulse was to take immediate revenge, but, bethinking himself where he was, he fully renounced his intention and forgave him for the love of the Madonna. His life however had been such that even though many years had passed since his death, his widow prayed earnestly for him and asked Joanna to do the same. One morning before matins as the saint was praying she beheld the unhappy man enveloped in flames as with a garment; he told her that for nineteen years he had been expiating his sins in Purgatory, unaided by the suffrages that had been offered for him, but now he was permitted to ask for them and God would accept them in his behalf.

There are many other examples given us in Dom Leo's life of the grace of contrition granted to the dying because they pardoned their enemies and gave up their intention of revenge; and we can easily understand how, considering the state of the times and the temper of the nation, this must have been a very usual difficulty.

It was Joanna's painful privilege to know the secret of the long purgatorial sufferings of some with

whom she had been acquainted on earth; she had also the joy of seeing many others enter quickly into the possession of eternal happiness. On October 24th, 1668, Signora Elisabetta Brocchi died; she was the mother of two nuns at St. Jerome's and of Catherine Brocchi; and Joanna was able to comfort her children with the assurance that after a very short purgatory she had gone to Heaven. Nevertheless Catherine continued to pray with great piety and fervour, and one Friday in March 1669 performed a devotion in honour of the Sacred Wounds of our Lord for the repose of her soul, having heard that it was very efficacious in obtaining mercy for those in Purgatory. She had not left the room when a letter was brought her from Joanna, in which she said, "O what an increase of accidental glory has not your mother received on account of your devotion in honour of the Sacred Wounds of our Lord." Catherine started at once for the monastery, and asking for Joanna said: "Where were you when I performed that devotion?" "I was at the moment saying grace after dinner," she replied. "But Mother, do you see everything I do?" "No," said Joanna, "only when it pleases God to allow me;" and of this Catherine had proof another time.

One evening the saint sent to tell her to come and see her the next morning as she had something to say. Catherine aware that she could penetrate the very depths of her soul took care to go to confession before seeing her. When Joanna came into

the parlour she laughed and said : "So you have been to confession ; our Lord has done with you as the sun does, for its rays shine on the mud without soiling themselves." Another day Catherine was in great distress for she had heard that her confessor, Father Ambrose, who had been ill, was dead, and she hastened to tell Joanna. As she was speaking the bell rang for Vespers and the servant of God went to the choir leaving Catherine in the parlour. When she returned after Vespers she told her that Father Ambrose was not dead, but better in health and would soon return to Bassano: this was true, and the good Father lived for twenty years after.

A still more remarkable event occurred at the end of 1668 or the beginning of the next year. A young German hearing of her sanctity went purposely to Bassano to see the saint. He was deeply in love with someone at the time, and carried in his pocket a case with her portrait painted on copper, and constantly took it out during his journey to gaze on it. When he came into the presence of the servant of God she counselled him to change his life and give himself to God. The young man felt that God really called him, but he would not obey the divine call. He went to see Joanna a few days after, and this time she spoke still more plainly, telling him she knew he wore the portrait, and adding that God demanded the sacrifice of this love for one more worthy of him. The cavalier went away from the monastery quite bewildered, and a few days after returned to Germany.

He had hardly arrived there when he received a letter from Joanna saying that she revoked all she had said about the picture, that he could keep it without scruple, and moreover give his whole heart to the original. Marvelling more than ever, he took out the picture to look again at it, and found that it had been changed into a most beautiful one of our Lady, a copy of that painted by St. Luke. Nothing more was wanted to decide him, and without delay he left all and entered religion. He gave the miraculous picture to Joanna, who, in her turn, gave it to a great friend, Taddea Bennassudi Monza and later on printed copies were made of it and distributed.

Joanna loved to give away holy things, and amongst others she had crosses made with the figure of our Lord in intaglio. Sebastiano Zecchini was the carver generally employed, and in the process of her beatification he said that she very often ordered such things of him, and paid promptly what he asked, a rare experience for an Italian workman, who is accustomed always to receive, after much delay, less than he demands. "One day," he continued, "she asked me if I liked making the crucifixes," I answered, "yes mother," and she added, "blessed are you who, by making these crucifixes, are the cause of so many prayers."

This year supplies us with a remarkable example of the breadth of Joanna's apostolate. A young girl had come from Trent with her mother to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Anthony of Padua.

On their way they stopped to see the carnival at Bassano, and took their places in one of the public galleries, in order to get a better view of the dancing and masquerading; suddenly the young girl was carried off by some men before the very eyes of her mother. Nothing was heard of her for six weeks, for the law had been unable to help her, and in Holy Week the poor mother was still distracted at the thought of her daughter's fate. Joanna, who was deeply interested in the unhappy girl, resolved that something should be done; with much trouble she found out in what house she was, and sent for her beloved friend, Signorina Brocchi, to help her in this work of charity. They determined to take the girl away by force, and means were devised to get her consent. At half past one o'clock on the night of Tuesday in Holy Week a ladder was put against the window of the room where she slept, and she escaped by it. The next morning Joanna sent her to Confession, and shortly after she returned with her mother to Trent.

Benedetto Volpe, the son of the Convent steward, in whom Joanna had been so practically interested was now twenty-three years of age, and she was very anxious that he should be ordained. In order that want of temporal means should not stand in the way, she obtained for him by her influence a *Mansioneria* in the Cathedral Chapter of Padua. Her surprise was great when, after this, he announced his intention of becoming a Franciscan, but her interest in him only increased, and we find

her writing on Sept. 20th, 1669, to one of her friends telling her that "the son of our steward wishes to renounce the world and has been accepted by the Reformed Franciscan Friars who will clothe him soon, but he has not the money to pay for his habit which will cost twenty-five ducats." She then goes on to ask for help in this work of charity. Ten months after we find another letter in which she says she has only been given eight ducats and entreats her correspondent to help her in order that the postulant may be clothed.

Benedetto had shown a certain lightness in his behaviour that led many to doubt whether he would ever become priest or friar, but Joanna believed in him through all, and in January we find her humbly asking for the money that still remained to complete the necessary sum wanted for his habit. Later on we shall see how this confidence was rewarded, and the reverence and gratitude of Don Benedetto towards his benefactress.

Greater anxiety than the care of this one soul weighed on the saint, for the suppression of many religious houses in the Venetian States cast the inmates adrift and led them into difficulties. Clement XI. in his interest for the Republic that had suffered so much and had been impoverished by war, famine and disease, entirely suppressed towards the end of 1608 the Jesuati, the Congregation of St. Maria delle Grazie and that of St. George in Alga, where the great Patriarch of Venice St. Laurence Justinian had given himself to God,

and handed over their revenues to the government. Dame Joanna felt this and the consequences following on it very bitterly, but she knew how to distinguish between grieving for the sufferings and even the scandals caused, and submitting to the action of legitimate authority. A beautiful letter of hers on the subject was written on Jan. 26th, 1669: "How sorrowful I am at hearing that so many holy communities are rooted out of the church of God, He alone knows! But being sure that He does it for a greater good I am a little comforted, for He thus chastises the abuses and sins of many religious, especially of those superiors who have neglected to punish imperfect subjects. The holy Founders must have begged God, that He Himself would provide the chastisement which the superiors hesitated to give to those religious and priests who commit sins that give grave scandal and bad example." Much of her letter is devoted to developing this idea, and it is striking how she attributed great trials like the present, not to the faults of whole communities, but to a small number of its members; she greatly sympathises with the innocent who suffer for the guilty: "I pray for all," she says, "that God may give them His Divine Grace, that the guilty may have light and contrition, and the good help and grace to do His most Holy Will."

An Abbot of one of the monasteries doomed to suppression wrote to ask her if he should wait until expelled by force, but she advised him to go quietly

of his own accord if he could do so without giving scandal. She earnestly recommends to him Fra Giammaria, a lay brother whom she had sent to him, begging that he should be kept as his servant: her common sense and fitness of things leads her to add that this would be better for the honour of the Abbot himself, as well as to the advantage of the young man. She ends her letter with asking his "prayers and blessing for the Right Revnd Mother Abbess, [Dame Faustina Navarrini] Sister Frances Geremii, and for Sister Susanna."

A visit was paid to Joanna this year by Cosimo III., Grand Duke of Tuscany, but the fact only, and no particulars are related. We also find her sending a letter to the Doge of Venice, Domenico Contarini, by a certain Carlo dei Carli in whose behalf she was interceding. On his return to Bassano he went to thank her for the favour she had been the means of procuring for him, and she asked him what were the reports in Venice about Candia which was besieged by the Ottomans and likely to fall: he replied that it was confidently believed it would be saved; but the servant of God said in a sad voice and with great conviction: "It will not be saved." It was ceded to the Sultan in the September of 1669.

Great interests did not make Joanna forgetful of the little pleasures she could do others, and we are not surprised that her large heart could occupy itself with them. In August, for example, she writes to a friend in Venice asking for little paper pictures to replace some she had given to her

nephews and nieces forgetting they were not hers to give. Again, she is asked to procure some pictures of a miraculous Madonna, which she immediately writes for to Innsbruck. Numerous little examples such as these could be cited, and show that, holy and full of important interests as she was, she did not forget the little gracefulnesses of life, the observance of which very often leave great effects behind them.

CHAPTER XIV.

(1669 — 1670)

Joanna speaks of her approaching death.
Intense suffering. Advice and counsel to
all. Last moments and death.



JOANNA'S life was drawing to a close, and it seemed that God wished to reward her past suffering and constant humiliations by the marks of special veneration and love she received from many good souls who flocked to the monastery during the last few months of her life, as if they had a foreknowledge of how soon they would lose her and see her face no more. Amongst others were Abbot Leoni and his sister, Countess Beatrice Buzzacarini. To them she spoke of her approaching death, but they would not believe it was near saying they should not know how to live without her help and protection. Joanna comforted them as best she could and told them not to doubt her

remembrance of them, either during life or after death, and added, "if God allows me, I will come to you."

In September she wrote to the Countess Porto at Vicenza, one of her dearest disciples: "I am so occupied that I can hardly find breathing time. Don Francesco and two priests from Venice are here now and they have been here the last three days; it is difficult to attend to everyone, so for the love of God, have pity on me." A couple of months later she writes about a lady who had intended coming to see her but had not been able: "I am sorry for their trouble but it is a good thing for me; I really should not have known what to do, as two days never pass without visitors coming. I do long for a little quiet: God knows that when some priests and people who were very good and spiritual were here I said many times to Him: Dear Lord forgive me, and in Your goodness restrain Your favours and give me the grace to be able to be a little alone with you,— *con voi da Sola a Solo*, and I am so smothered, so to speak, and so anxious that these visits to me should have an end that I can do nothing but pray to Him to put some hindrance in their way, and to console and help people Himself and thus take from them their wish to come to me."

Those who came from a distance to see Joanna were taken care of with Benedictine charity. The poor were lodged in the house of the steward who was a little apt to resent his share in the business;

others were received in the guest-house, whilst others again were welcomed by the Brocchi, Joanna's devoted friends, who had a house adjoining the monastery, and Catherine says they had frequently to receive ladies, gentlemen, bishops, prelates, religious and foreigners of rank.

In other ways, too, God was disposing hearts towards His servant, and suspicion and mistrust were giving way to confidence. The Vicar General of Vicenza; her Confessor, Don Gianbattista; the Pro-Vicar at Bassano, and many other priests holding distinguished positions had become well-disposed towards the saint; this was notably the case with her confessors who, after her death, did not hesitate to say that, "her conscience was so pure, it was not possible to find matter for absolution," and that, "the servant of God had true and perfect purity of conscience, undefiled by sin;" another was in the "greatest admiration and edification at her purity of conscience." These testimonies were not only the result of their knowledge of her in the confessional, but of their observance of her daily saintly life. One of her confessors, the chaplain of the monastery, Gianbattista Danieli, experienced to his own benefit the effects of her holiness and gift of counsel. He had been tempted for a long time on subjects that put his eternal salvation in danger and Joanna was aware of it. Her heart was filled with compassion and she resolved to strive to help him at any cost. One day she boldly broached the subject, and,

having once begun, went into minute details on his trouble. She unrolled before him every fold of his conscience, and entreated him to drive out of his soul certain passions, and touched the right cause of all his difficulties when she exclaimed: "But Father you are vacillating in things of faith." These words opened his eyes, and his good will soon rectified the cause of his difficulties as far as they were spiritual. He nevertheless had another trial in his delicate health, and in February 1669, he was considered in immediate danger of death. One of his nieces went in all haste to Joanna and told her that the doctor had given up all hope of his recovery, but the saint reassured her and told her that he would be cured of his illness. The event justified her words, and the cure was attributed by the doctor himself to Joanna's prayers.

She herself suffered terribly from sciatica and was unable to walk without the aid of a stick: and worse still an internal disease seemed to burn out her very life, yet, she kept faithfully to the duties of community life and was never absent from the choir, chapter house, workroom or refectory. Her ardent love of God seemed to increase with her sufferings, and the nuns were full of wonder at the burning words she addressed to them. Towards her Abbess, who had been one of those most opposed to her, she showed the greatest reverence and affection. As her life was drawing to a close her sisters in the community seemed more and more dear to her; her beloved novices and the

children in the school, those young souls, ready and willing to be formed as perfect children of God, seemed to creep deeper and deeper into her heart, and we are not surprised that one of the last acts recorded of her should have been to confirm one of them in her vocation to monastic life. It was towards Christmas, her last on earth, and Francesca Bassani one of the pupils of the nuns, was struggling with grace; God wanted her all to Himself but she feared the rigours of a life of detachment and mortification. Then a disfiguring malady attacked her face, and Joanna saw in it a sign that God would force her to do what she would not do freely. "See, my child," she said "God has called you to religion, and because you refuse to hear His divine voice He chastises you." Francesca was vanquished; she listened to God's call and became a good nun.

Another pupil in the monastery school at this time was debating within herself whether she would give herself to God in religion; being in the choir one day she spontaneously made up her mind to offer herself to God in the cloister for ever. Joanna happened to be in the choir at the same moment, and as they both left it together she whispered: "I rejoice that you are going to become a religious." That young girl of sixteen was still alive at the age of eighty and could give evidence at the Apostolic enquiry into Joanna's life. She took the name of Joanna Mary through respect and veneration for the saint to whom also she was slightly related.

The sick, too, had last proofs of Joanna's loving kindness; to them she was more than ever an angel of consolation. Dame Helen Tiozzi died about this time, and Joanna's care followed her after death. Dame Francesca Bassani relates in simple words an experience not uncommon in religious houses. "The old nuns and my novice mistress Costa, used to say that Dame Helen was heard for some time after her death walking about the monastery; the servant of God offered up so many prayers for her that the noises soon ceased, and it was even said that Dame Helen appeared to her, thanking her and saying that through her intercession she was going to heaven."

A foreknowledge of her death was given to the servant of God, and she spoke of it in very clear words to the steward of the monastery. Don Benedetto Volpe still hesitated about becoming a friar, although the necessary money for his entry had been collected. The father was unhappy over the hesitation of his son, and spoke of it to Joanna. "Mother," he said, "my priest does everything contrary to what he says." "Do not doubt," she replied, "that he will really enter amongst the Reformed Friars, where he will be beloved and do well; but listen, dear Messer Antonio, when he is there he will become blind, and what will you do? will you give way to despair? I shall certainly not be here to console either you or Don Benedetto." She accompanied these last words with a significant little laugh that implied even more than her words:

Dames Margareta, Justina, Sister Susanna and the steward's wife were present at this conversation.

In 1670 the feast of the Purification fell on a Sunday. Before matins, Joanna had risen as usual on hearing the sound of the Capuchin bell, and standing at the window of her cell, she looked in the direction of the monastery which was quite near. Suddenly, she beheld a line of fire that seemed to stretch from the window of one of their cells into heaven itself. No knowledge was given her at the moment in explanation, but a few days after she heard that Padre Serafino, a friar of very saintly life, whose cell this had been, had on the same night and hour given up his soul to God in Venice.

There was no class of persons, it would seem, who had not been benefited by Joanna, especially as her life came to a close, and we must not omit to mention a holy secular, who, attracted by her fame of sanctity, asked and obtained permission from the Holy See in March 1669, to live in the Monastery. This was Countess Anna Maria di Collalto;¹ and so great was her fidelity to the teaching Joanna gave her that she died in the repute of holiness on February 14th, 1670. The servant of God, says the old summary, "saw her standing in purgatory in a garden for one night only, and in the morning she entered heaven." She seems to have desired

¹ The body of Blessed Juliana di Collalto, Benedictine Abbess, is preserved incorrupt at Venice in the church of S. Eufemia. She died in 1267.

the saint to distribute her belongings after her death, for we are told she gave most of her clothes to three nieces of Dame Faustina Navarrini, then Abbess, who with these three nieces had been amongst Joanna's greatest enemies, and had called and treated her "as a fool and not a saint."

But time was drawing to an end, and Joanna's life of praise, penance, humility and charity was nearly spent. The 18th February that year fell on a Tuesday, and during the night she felt so ill that she could not sleep; notwithstanding this, she rose for matins and even passed Wednesday and Thursday in the observance of the Rule, hiding the extent of her sufferings from others. During Friday night she was still worse with sharp fever, pain and faintness. So great was her difficulty in dressing that she arrived in choir only just in time for the *Domine quid multiplicati sunt* which according to the custom of the monastery was intoned by the Prioress; but her voice, usually strong, was so weak that the nuns looked at her in astonishment and the Abbess told her to return to bed. In the morning she arose for Mass which she heard on her knees. When it was over she was so ill that she had to be helped to her cell and laid on her bed. Her frequent exclamation was: *Paratum cor meum Deus, paratum cor meum*, and repeating this offering of herself to the holy Will of God, she awaited the doctor's arrival. The physician and surgeon of the community came in all haste, but unanimously declared that there was no hope, as her malady

was incurable. The news spread like wildfire through Bassano, and the people grieved as if for a public calamity.

The illness continued, accompanied alternately by great pain and frequent drowsiness : whenever she spoke her words were of God, and this was especially noticed in the delirium which sometimes came on. She fell ill on Saturday, and on Monday wished to make her Confession and receive Holy Communion. It was evident from what she said to her confessor, that she was fully conscious of her approaching death : "*Paratum cor meum* this is my last illness and within a few days I must die, but I beg you not to say so."

Willingly would she have received Holy Communion every day but a burning thirst prevented her; on Wednesday it was brought to her as Viaticum and was indeed to be the Food of the last long journey for she never received it again. Before communicating she begged the Abbess to allow all the nuns to come to her as soon as the Office was over. As the day was breaking they assembled silently inside and around the door of their dying Prioress' cell. Her first words were to ask the blessing of the Abbess, then she turned towards the community and addressed them in loving words which brought tears into all their eyes. "I die confidently," she added, "for I hope by the Precious Blood of my Jesus, and by your prayers to find Him Who awaits me." The sobs of her sisters interrupted her and seeing that

she was fatigued the Abbess said : " Do not speak any longer, dear Mother, it tires you too much ; they all understand and promise not to leave you in your great necessity, and you in your turn will remember us in paradise." Then Joanna received her Lord and remained out of herself during her thanksgiving—so absorbed was she during this last union with her sacramental Lord.

The days passed, and still she lingered on. One by one the nuns would go to her to hear the last words she had to say to them. " Mother Prioress," said one, " now is the time to do what you have always wished, and if it used to pain you to think that you could not keep our Lord company when on the cross which He had chosen, now, my Mother, that He is in glory you may comfort yourself with the thought that He has put you on His cross in His place." Joanna answered with a look more eloquent than words which seemed to say : " What are my sufferings compared to those He bore for me." Another said : " Mother Prioress do you want to go to Paradise?" " O God," she answered, " who would not willingly go there!"

When she was told that her dear friend, Countess Porto at Vicenza, was having many prayers said for her, she exclaimed : " God bless her for doing so, and let her rest assured that I shall not fail to pray for her as far as I am able."

Amongst the pupils who came to say their last farewell and get their loved mistress' last blessing was one who afterwards became a nun under the

name of Dame Paulina Boeri. She was accompanied by Dame Serafica Furetti, who said to Joanna : " Pray for this girl that she may embrace the state of life which will be most for the glory of God," and Joanna answered : " God has not failed to enlighten her, it remains for her to correspond," " and," added Dame Paulina in her deposition, " I had already made up my mind, but had not spoken of my vocation to anyone."

One day the pupils came together to see her and she spoke to them all in general. They were going away when the dying nun made a sign to one, Cassandra Fava, niece of Dame Teresa, to stay. When they were alone she said gravely : " My child you are called by God to religion, but you will not correspond to His call, because you have made up your mind to remain in the world. But be sure that in the state of matrimony you will suffer great disaster and tribulations." Poor Cassandra! She was to find to her cost how true a prophetess was Joanna. Many years later she gave her written testimony of what she had suffered after marrying a rich husband with whom she had believed she would be happy. " I married," she writes, " and my first child was more than four years old before he could walk or speak and soon after he died ; then my little girl, after being twelve years ill, died also. I suffered many other sorrows and troubles, tribulations and torments." Perhaps Cassandra was not so much to be blamed for her want of faith in Joanna's prophecy, as her Aunt, Dame Teresa,

one of the Saint's bitterest enemies, no doubt influenced her niece to disregard it.

From all parts came letters desiring news of Joanna and begging her prayers; within and without the Cloister the sorrow at her approaching death was intense. The invalid herself made all the use she could of these days of preparation for the great journey. Unwilling to lose her last chances of likeness to her Divine Lord, she practised mortification as far as she was able, even refusing the small solace of changing her serge for the linen offered her.

On the Friday night after she had been taken ill, she became so faint that those around thought that the end was at hand. Dame Placida Reata, who was with her took her hand and, feeling it very cold became much alarmed and said: "Mother Prioress would you like the confessor to be sent for?" She answered smiling: "It is not yet time, when it is, I will tell you." Soon after she slightly recovered, and on the morning of Saturday, March 1st, the doctor found her less feverish and less weak. Hope ran high in the community and in the town; but the morning passed and in the afternoon there was a slight diminution of strength. The saint remained immovable with her eyes fixed on a picture of our Lady with her dead Son in her arms. At a little after three Dame Placida entered her cell; she made a sign to her to come near and said: "Now send to call the confessor, and have the charity to do it quickly." The confessor was ill; but the

Chaplain hastened to the bedside of the dying nun and heard her confession. Then he gave her the Sacrament of Extreme Unction which she received with that lively faith that had characterised every action of her life. Around her knelt the community, their prayers interrupted by their tears. The recommendation of a parting soul was said, Joanna herself repeating the sacred words. She never tired of looking at and kissing the wounds of the Crucifix held before her by the priest. The evening *Ave* drew near; the shadows were falling in the cell; an inspiration came to the minister of God and he asked if she was willing to give him her soul to place it in the side of her Lord; Joanna answered: "Yes Father:" these were her last words. For one hour longer she lay awaiting the Bridegroom's call, a happy smile upon her face, and then the summons came, and smiling still, she gave up her soul into the hands of Him Who had created, redeemed and espoused it.



CHAPTER XV.

(1670-1672.)

Signs accompanying her death. Universal mourning. Last will and Testament. Miracles; visions; veneration of remains.



ANY were the signs accompanying that saintly death; Catherine Miozzi was with others in the choir when it occurred, and turning round to them, she said : "Now our dear Mother is dead." When she was asked how she knew, her reply was that she had seen her soul enter the Side of Christ. They all immediately went to the cell and found that Catherine was right. At the same time also Catherine Brocchi and her sister Virginia were standing at a window of their house which looked on the monastery, for they knew how ill Joanna was. As they looked they both saw a bright flame, which, coming from her cell, went straight up to heaven. They did not doubt for a moment that, like her great Patriarch and Lawgiver, she had gone by that bright way to paradise. That path of glory was seen also by Sister Dorothy, who, at the moment of her death, was in one of the courtyards of the monastery : she also knew what it signified and cried out : "Let those come here who have not believed in the holiness of the servant of God." Dame Serafica Furetti, who was cellarer at the time, was not less

favoured; she was occupied in the kitchen when she heard of the great loss of their beloved Prioress, and hurried to the cell where the body lay looking like transparent ivory. Dame Serafica broke into a torrent of tears, for "truly we could say with Jeremias, *defecit gaudium cordis nostri, versus est in luctum chorus noster.*" The cell seemed to her full of light and of the sweetest perfume, and the dead nun lay stretched on her pallet, her lips parted in the same sweet smile with which she had answered the Bridegroom's call.

In Bassano the mourning was universal. Crowds hurried to the monastery at the news crying, "the Saint is dead." The holy body was laid out in the Sacristy as was customary, and people were allowed to look at it through a window at which the nuns communicated. They were not content with this but begged that rosaries and other things, even handkerchiefs, should touch her body. Many had to go away without seeing her for the number was too great for all to satisfy their devotion, but all perceived the sweet scent that filled the Church.

Reports of all this reached the ear of the Pro-Vicar, Don Giambattista Freschi. Even in death the opposition of the Curia was to follow the saint, and he immediately wrote to the Abbess forbidding all such manifestations of reverence towards the dead, even ordering that the little window, through which the people could see her as she lay on her bier, should be shut. He came himself to see that his orders were carried out, and thus witnessed the

angry discontent of the people who persisted in calling her "the saint." "What saint," he exclaimed, "she is a nun like all the others." This exasperated them still more, and they hotly accused the Pro-Vicar of blasphemy in refusing her the title to which they felt sure she had a right. He was not to be moved, and even went the further length of forbidding anything that had belonged to her to be given away. This was the culminating point, and the people gave way to their anger with all their excitable Italian nature. Threats of "stone him," and indescribable clamour arose in the very church itself: no regard was paid to the body of her whose sanctity they united to defend and certainly none to the priestly office of the Pro-Vicar, who at last saved himself by flight.

On Monday the funeral took place, and the Church was crowded with people who had come, not indeed to pray for the dead, but to beg her prayers for themselves. It was the custom at St. Jerome's to bury the nuns without coffins, and they, knowing this, had sent some of the principal men of the town to ask that Joanna might be buried in a coffin worthy of her, adding that they would bear the expense. The reply was that this could not be done under the circumstances without the permission of the Vicar; this was asked, and, needless to say, refused. The steward of the monastery, the father of Don Benedetto, made up his mind that he was not obliged to obey the Vicar, and, being sent to open the grave, made a coffin of

the boards of her bed which he put in it, so that when the body was lowered, it rested in the coffin. So far all went well, but when the assistants had gone away he put the lid on, and in fastening it down made so much noise that the Abbess sent to know what had happened. When the grave was well covered with earth, he explained what he had done, and great was the rejoicing of the people of Bassano. Joanna was buried on the very spot where, thirty-four years previously, Sister Susanna had been struck by lightning.

The servant of God had left a spiritual Last Will and Testament, in imitation, perhaps, of St. Gertrude. She had written it on the anniversary of her Profession Day in 1658, and after her death it was found and read.

1658. 15th August.

Irrevocable Offering and Voluntary Testament made to the great Mother of God the most holy Virgin Mary, my Lady and Mistress by me, Sister Joanna Mary Bonomo, a most unworthy creature.

Although I am ashamed to appear in thy most holy presence, yet, on this thy blessed festival, I offer thee all the affections of my heart, soul and spirit: I institute thee heiress of all the actions I have ever performed and ever shall perform, and of all my thoughts, words and sufferings, external and internal. I make thee absolute mistress for ever of all my desires, and of all that I have ever pos-

sessed, do possess and shall possess both of things exterior, or things interior. I ratify this gift with my own hand, and I desire that it may be an irrevocable donation that may never be retracted nor diminished by any codicil or by anything else whatever. Holy Mother, I beg thee to accept this offering of myself, and I make thee Mistress and Heiress of my body, soul and heart, of my life and of my death. At the same time I pray that being wholly thine, thou wilt preserve me in life and especially that thou wilt succour and console me in the hour of death. Also I implore thee to present this little legacy to thy most sweet Son, my Lord. I trust that through the love He bears thee He may deign to approve this my writing and accept this my offering, by adding it to the Treasury of His Infinite Mercy and Goodness. I confide in thy bounty and trust that thou wilt receive me willingly, and that He, by His Infinite Mercy, will also accept this my gift from thy most holy hands.

And ye blessed spirits, especially glorious St. Joachim, St. Anna, St. Joseph, St. John Baptist, St. John the Evangelist with all the host of the redeemed, be ye my faithful witnesses and advocates before the Queen of Heaven. Holy Father St. Benedict plead for me. O ye mine angelic choirs, and thou especially, my own Angel guardian, pray that this my offering may be accepted, and that our gracious Lady may keep this writing as her own, and watch over me at the hour of my death. Moreover, holy Virgin, I pray you to forgive

the faults I have committed in dissipating this my heritage. Grant me grace that, with thy help and that of the angels and of the Saints in Paradise, I may always increase it by good and holy acts of virtue, and I pray that in the brief time which remains to me I may compensate for what I ought to have done in the past.

Gracious Lady, I would assure you that if I were able, I would do all the good works that have ever been done, or ever will be done by all creatures in all eternity. I desire, too, to suffer all torments that all creatures have suffered or will suffer that in so doing I may render the greater service to you, O Lady, Queen and Mother of my most sweet Jesus Christ. Moreover, adding these sufferings to the heritage which I leave thee, I offer myself to thee as daughter, servant and slave for evermore, and in token of this oblation not only do I write this declaration, but I purpose to wear this chain upon my body till death.

May all this be to the greater glory of God and of thee my most beloved Lady. I add that having left thee heiress of myself, of all my deeds, words and sufferings past, present and future, I desire that this act of my hand may be irrevocable. I pray thee, however, most holy Virgin Lady and my most faithful heiress, to decree that all that displeases thee may be rendered perfect by thee, and that I may never think, or speak, or work in any manner, but in that which is most acceptable to thee and to my God.

May I never neglect to do, think, speak and suffer anything that could be to His Glory, so that my every act may be to His honour and thy service, and I pray that thou wilt make me do everything according to thy pleasure, for this will ever be my desire. In confirmation of all this I make here as seal and oath this holy cross ✝, as pledge that I am and always will be wholly thine.

Amen, Jesus, Maria."

"I add, O my sweetest Lady and Mother of my God, to-day 15th August, 1662, how greatly I wish that I were able to create millions and millions of worlds with a million more creatures than will ever have been in existence at the end of time, solely that at the consummation of all things they should always have been thy faithful servants. I would wish that this vast host should ever have spent itself in thy service and to the greater glory of the Most Holy Trinity, and that they should always have loved thee with a love surpassing even that of the seraphim. At my every breath and movement I intend to offer thee all these things in union with the greatest services that could be rendered to thee by all creation.

I place this writing and testament at the feet of the most holy Lauretan image, and again confirm forever all that I have promised."

The first thing everyone seemed to think of doing after the funeral was to get possession of something

that had belonged to the deceased, and it was noticed that a strong perfume attached itself to everything belonging to her. Sister Susanna was able to get for Don Benedetto the crutch she had used so much the latter part of her life, and the pen with which she had written so many letters. The first use he made of the latter was to write an account of his holy benefactress, — an account from which many details have been taken, especially concerning her last illness and death.

Far and wide the news of her death had spread and brought desolation to many hearts. One of those who felt it deeply, and whose opinion is of special interest to us just now, as her own beatification is being considered, was Sister Joanna Mary of the Cross, Abbess of the Capuchins in Roveredo, who wrote to Catherine Brocchi a fortnight after Joanna's death. After speaking of the sorrow she felt at the news, she goes on to say, "I did not fail to beg God to grant her health, if it were expedient, but when the soul has attained to the last state of perfection for which it was created, our Lord does not leave it any longer on earth, but raises it to that glory which He has prepared for it from eternity." She ends with saying that she would like to have Joanna's life as soon as it is printed, and some of the little pictures of our Lady which she had painted, and adds that "it is not a matter for wonder that the Vicar General had forbidden them to distribute anything belonging to her outside the monastery, for this is no unusual thing

to happen in regard to God's servants, and would finally serve to prove and corroborate the truth of the graces God gave to this blessed and beloved soul."

Touching visions of the departed saint are told us. Dame Francesca Geremii relates how she saw her more than once walking about that house, which in her lifetime had been the "enclosed garden" where she had dwelt long years with her Spouse. Passing through the dormitory one night she met her looking all joyful. Addressing her, she exclaimed: "My dear, blessed Mother, how goes it with you?" "Well," she answered; "And are you in Paradise?" The reply was that she was, and had reached it by passing through a most beautiful garden. To the question as to whether she was in great glory she answered: "Very great." Then Dame Francesca asked if she remembered her in her prayers, and the saint assuring her that she did, disappeared.

The assurance of this great glory she enjoyed in Heaven was repeated to Father Paul Bonardi of Padua. She appeared to him in a dream towards dawn, and when he questioned her, as Dame Francesca had done, about the degree of glory surrounding her, she answered: "It is, indeed, very great."

Dame Francesca believed she beheld Joanna another time: she seemed herself to be in the cemetery and saw her beloved Mistress standing near the Sacristy. "At such a sight," she writes "I was filled with consolation. I ran forward and

threw myself at her feet trying to grasp her hand and kiss it, and to make her sign the cross on my forehead as she used to do in life. But she drew back and told me not to touch her. I obeyed, and wished in my great joy to speak to her and ask her several questions. Then she began to walk quickly away, and I followed her. When we came near her own grave, she stopped, knelt upon it and kissed the ground rising she continued to walk and I to follow. When we were near a little Chapel within the monastery, I stopped and said : "O my dear Mother, why are you going away so quickly, without saying anything to me? You know how much I have suffered, and do suffer for your sake, and yet, you want to leave me without any consolation." Then she replied : "My dear daughter, do not suffer yourself to be unhappy, but resign yourself to the Divine Will. Remember also that you left your country and friends to serve God alone, and that we all, one after the other, must separate from each other; therefore you must not grieve, for this is displeasing to God." Then she once more walked on and passed into the Chapel where she knelt down and kissed the ground; as she rose to leave it I once again addressed her saying : "Dear Mother, before you go, tell me one other thing," and she answered that she would willingly do so. "Then I asked her if I was in a state of grace and pleasing to God." As I said this I came to myself without having had an answer."

Poor Dame Francesca! So the great question we all want answered remained unsolved!

Blessed Joanna's great friends, the Abbate Leoni and his sister Contessa Buzzacarini had their share, too, in her graces, for during the night of March 15th, little less than a month after her death, the Abbot saw the Saint standing before our Lady interceding for him. The Queen of Heaven was clothed in royal robes and seated in a triumphal car drawn by six white horses. Believing as he did in the holiness of Joanna, this was a joy to the devout Abbot, which was singularly increased when his sister related to him her experience of that same memorable day. She was in the habit of reciting the Divine Office, and having finished its recitation she put her Breviary on a table and left the room, locking the door behind her. A little after she returned, and looked quite accidentally at the place where she had left her Breviary. To her surprise, she saw a paper lying on it covered with a hand-writing which she recognised as Joanna's. It was as follows:

"Dearly beloved souls, listen now to what you have to do to find Christ. In the first place, you must love Him, the Supreme and True Good, Who chose to suffer bitter torments for us; then you must strive to acquire the virtues that make souls so dear to Him. This is the true way to find Jesus Christ and secure Heaven: Amen."

An almost similar incident is recorded in connection with the Abbess of San Marco in Padua, Dame

Lucy Electa Frazzini. She had wished, even during the saint's lifetime, to have one of the little pictures she was accustomed to paint on white silk, but had been unable to gratify herself. One day she went into a room in the monastery where flowers were kept, and saw a picture on the ground; picking it up, she found it was the very one she wanted. On enquiring, she was told that no one in the house had lost it, or knew anything about it. A little later she heard that Elizabeth Brocchi had died at St. Jerome's and a similar picture kept in her Breviary could not be found anywhere.

But we must not forget Don Benedetto Volpe who really did enter amongst the Reformed Franciscans in April, 1670. After he had been there a short time he was obliged to leave, owing to a malady in the eyes which made him quite blind. He and his father bethought themselves of Joanna in their extremity, and remembered the words she had spoken not long before her death. They prayed earnestly to her, and then touched the sightless eyes with the crutch she had used. Their faith was rewarded and he completely recovered his sight. What became of Don Benedetto we do not know, but looking back on the hopes and prophecies of his holy benefactress we cannot doubt that they were fulfilled.

It would be interminable to go into detail on the marvellous cures wrought by the servant of God, the fame of whose holiness spread beyond Italy, especially in the monasteries of her Order. In

1672 the Abbess of the ancient Abbey of Nonberg, who was herself named Mary Joanna, sent an account of a miraculous cure vouchsafed to her through the intercession of her namesake, and the application of one of the pictures which she had painted; unfortunately, no details are given.

Many were the persons who came from long distances, hoping to obtain graces on the spot that they had perhaps been unable to obtain without the pilgrimage. Even Germany, Austria and Bavaria had its representatives, and we hear amongst others of a noble Bavarian who came to fulfil a vow she had made to go to Bassano, on the event of a relation being cured through the merits of the venerable servant of God; she brought as an offering to the monastery Church, a silver Chalice and Paten.

So did God glorify the humble nun in death whose life had been full of opprobrium and suffering. "With Christ she had been nailed to the cross," therefore God exalted her so that her name was in the mouths of all, and her power with Him in death was in proportion to her likeness to Him in life.



CHAPTER XVI.

(1672 -- 1880.)

Miracles. Beatification. Conclusion.

AFTER such a life we cannot wonder that there should have been a strong conviction that the day would come when Joanna would be raised to the altar, and consequently materials for her life were collected with loving eagerness. As the bishop of Bassano kept up his opposition to the saint even after her death, we are not surprised to find that the task of collecting such materials was not undertaken in his diocese, but in that of Padua to which by birth she had belonged, and whose bishop at that time was Blessed Cardinal Gregorio Barbarigo. His own desire for the glorification of Joanna was increased by the zeal of the Abbot Leoni, whose personal knowledge of her sanctity made him most anxious that no time should be lost in getting matter together, whilst certain events were still fresh in the memory of those who could testify on their own knowledge, and show the letters she had written to them. But from some persons there seems to have been great difficulty in getting either papers or the narration of facts, and the poor Abbot complains bitterly of the reticence of those whose fidelity led them to keep the secrets confided to them by Joanna, rather than reveal them even for her greater honour and the good of

souls. Amongst these was Sister Susanna who was willing enough to tell what was generally known, but could not be persuaded to speak of what she had been told in confidence.

From the materials collected with so much labour, Sale's book was written; it was never printed but circulated in manuscript amongst devout persons. Joanna seems to have looked down approvingly on this labour of love, if we may judge by a grace she obtained for one of the writer's family. His brother dying of consumption was advised to try the efficacy of the saint's intercession, and after swallowing some of her hair ground into powder was instantly relieved, and soon after entirely recovered, and was still living at the time of the process for her beatification. This was in 1673.

The next life written was in 1674 by Garzadoro, a young man and a Lateran Canon.

For some years no other life was written, but in 1690 Dame Pellegrina Costa was made Abbess, and her loving devotion towards her saintly mistress made her desire to introduce the cause of her beatification as soon as possible. The bishop of the diocese who had been so hostile to her had died in 1679, and the present bishop was a nephew of the Pope Alexander VIII. The Abbess thought that the best way to stir up devotion towards Joanna would be to bring out a new and fuller life. Information was collected from all parts, letters were copied, her two books on the Passion, which had become very difficult to get, were procured, and

manuscripts were discovered of which the existence was hardly known before. The work was confided to Padre Fieramosca, a Friar Minor of Vicenza, but was never published.

After her beatification other lives were written, one by the Abbate Lombardi in 1783, and another by Padre Luigi Maria da Vicenza, a reformed Franciscan, in 1798. These with some others of less importance sufficed until Dom Leo Bracco, on the occasion of the saint's centenary of beatification, wrote his life compiled from every source from which he could possibly draw, and although its prolixity prevents the possibility of translating into english it has been largely referred to in this little volume.

With all this veneration of Joanna one is surprised to find how petty jealousies and enmities held their ground. In 1675 her adversaries tried to get her writings condemned, and *Il tesoro dell' anima cristiana* and others were sent to the Congregation of Rites for judgment. That judgment was favourable and no doubt this very fact increased the desire for the public recognition of her sanctity.

Six years after her death, the conviction of the extraordinary holiness of the servant of God and the expectation of external signs of God's favours towards her had become so strong, that some of the nuns determined to prove how much truth there was in a remark she had made one day to the effect that she lived without a heart, her heart having been given to Our Lord. Between the

night of the last day of February and the first day of March, Dame Serafica Furetti, Dame Serafina Navarrini, Dame Jane Frances Geremii, Dame Joanna Mary Colpi and Dame Laura Mary Furetti with Jerome Volpato and Marietta, lay-sisters, went to her grave and after much labour found her body. The head, arms and legs were those of a skeleton but the rest of the body was entire. To Dame Joanna Mary was confided the task of opening the breast to seek the heart that during life had beaten for God alone. The account can only be given in her own words :

“We found in the breast a skin which is called the membrane of the heart, with the stigmata, another large skin, the membrane of the stomach, and a piece of dark flesh which is called the spleen: all these were incorrupt and the blood flowed on opening them. Besides these we found a large piece of flesh attached to the spine, which was not touched, but we could not find the heart. On touching the holy body I found myself suddenly freed from a skin disease and a cramp of the nerves which had tormented me for a long time. Meanwhile the other nuns removed these remains and after drying them placed them in a box, which was itself put inside a chest, sealed and locked with three keys.” Dame Laura Furetti gives the same description adding that none of them were able to discover the heart although careful search was made in the place where it should be. When they had finished they reverently clothed the body

afresh, changed the wreath of dead flowers, then covered it again with the board and earth which had always protected it.

Such an event could not be kept secret and we are not surprised to hear of its effect upon others. Dame Teresa Fava, whose enmity of the saint had survived her death, became one of her greatest devotees and began to extol her heroic patience — as well she might — and added in her humility that if the servant of God had had no other injuries and insolences to endure than those from her, she would have had enough to make her a saint, and obtain the first place in heaven. Dame Mechtildis Cerati, another of her enemies, wished only to be able to “take her from her grave and embalm her.”

Within a few years of Joanna's death most of those contrary to her died. We find that Dame Scholastica Fossa expired on the 10th January, 1673, Dame Faustina Navarini eighteen months later, and Dame Brigid Omaccini in October of 1676. This last died of consumption at the age of forty as Joanna had predicted. There was yet another, Dame Eletta Bardini, who occasionally had joined the ranks of the saint's opponents, and who became so ill that her life was despaired of. Turning to Joanna she thus prayed: “Sister Joanna, my beloved, if you will only cure me I shall say that you are a big saint *Santona*.” Hardly had she uttered the words than she was cured, and proved her gratitude by constant devotion to her benefactress during the rest of her life.

By 1696 nearly all who had been companions of Joanna were also dead. Many had worked hard to get the heroism of her virtues recognised, but they were all to die without this satisfaction. From this fact we have been deprived of much information that would have been revealed at their examination under oath for the introduction of her cause. Twenty-nine years elapsed before the first steps were taken for her beatification, and then a hundred and forty-three witnesses were examined. Amongst these the Abbess, Dame Catherine Vittorelli, was the only one who had been professed in the saint's lifetime, three others had made their vows a little after her death; they were Dames Laura Furetti, Joanna Mary Colpi and Rose Francesca Bassani. It took six years to collect all the depositions, and at last on March 6th 1706 the process was opened with all formality by Clement XI. Delay after delay came from want of money, and nothing was done until 1728 when collections were made for the purpose throughout the Venetian States. Then by command of Benedict XIII. her writings, printed and in manuscript, were examined, and before 1742 everything including the *Tesoro dell' anima cristiana* was approved. Amongst the witnesses examined at this time were Dames Laura Furetti and Joanna Mary Colpi, who had both attained the age of eighty, and were the only persons remaining who had personally known the saint, whose body at this time was removed from the common cemetery and put in a separate place to protect it from damp.

The translation of the body was the occasion of a miracle which shews that Joanna's love of the lay-sisters survived her death. Sister Maura Locatelli had fallen ill thirteen years before of acute fever accompanied by terrible pains in the stomach. In course of time paralysis came on, and she was incapable of moving almost any part of her body, but especially the left side. A terrible swelling in the head and sleeplessness was added to this; no remedy was left untried, and doctor after doctor failed in curing or even giving her any relief. Hearing of the intended translation of the body, the invalid commenced a novena to the servant of God, and her conviction became intense that if she could only touch the sacred bones she would be healed. On the last day, June 26th, 1736, she begged the infirmarian to dress her; the nun laughed, and when she had finished said jokingly, "now you are able to do for yourself, and I can certainly leave you without help, no doubt you can feed yourself and even walk." But Sister Maura answered seriously: "That is indeed true, for in a few minutes I shall be cured and able to walk alone; take care that my portion is not forgotten in the refectory, for I am certain I shall be able to eat to day with the others." Saying this she rose up and walked quickly to the grave which was being opened. The coffin was visible and some of its planks had been removed so that the holy body could be seen; stretching out her arm she touched it, and was immediately cured.

This miracle put hope into the heart of another who was in the infirmary of St. Jerome's. Dame Candida Rosa Bardini had suffered for years from a terrible ulcer in the stomach so that she could retain no food. She declared on that memorable day, that if she were allowed to be one of the four nuns who were to carry the body to its new resting place she also would be cured. The Abbess, Dame Placida Tacconi, at first refused, but moved by the other's confidence gave the desired and apparently absurd permission. From that moment she became better and on the Feast of SS. Peter and Paul was one of the four to bear the heavy coffin a long distance to its final destination.

Yet another miracle out of many may be quoted as it recalls that which St. Gregory relates as having taken place in St. Benedict's cave after his death. A niece of Catherine Brocchi, named Teresa, became insane, with no hope of ever recovering her reason. Her family was in despair until the thought suggested itself that Joanna who had so loved the aunt might cure the niece. Profiting of a moment of comparative calm they took her to the sepulchre and made her kneel down; on rising up she was entirely cured, and there was never after any return of her dreadful malady.

Every miracle helped on the cause and increased the desire for the beatification, but Benedict XIV. had lately made new and strict decrees regarding the mode of procedure in canonizations, and this contributed to prolong the delay. In 1752 a

strange event hastened it a little and ensured the interest and influence of the ambassador of Venice to Rome, Pier Andrea Cappello, who had often heard his mother speak of the servant of God. One morning he was very ill in bed, but in full possession of his mental faculties. Opposite to the bed was a very large mirror, and looking at it he suddenly saw the figure of a nun dressed as a Benedictine. He felt convinced it was Joanna and sent for his wife to find out if she could see the apparition, but found that it was invisible to her eyes. All that day it was seen by the sick man, who, towards evening, promised that if he were cured he would do his best to help on the beatification of the holy nun. Almost simultaneously with the promise, a letter was brought to him from the Abbess of St. Jerome's asking him to interest himself in the cause and promising in return the protection of Joanna. The coincidence touched the ambassador very much and he renewed the promise he had made. A few days after an engraving of the saint was sent to him by his mother and he then found that the apparition exactly resembled her. It is needless to add that he was cured of his malady.

In spite of this, things very soon after resumed their slow pace, and it was only in 1780 that Pius VI. decided on publishing the decree for the public cultus of the servant of God and her immediate beatification. Even then the actual ceremony only took place on June 9th, 1783. At the same

time an order was sent to the bishop of Vicenza to proceed to the opening of the sepulchre and the recognition of the body. The new coffin in which she was put was designed by a famous carver; when finished it was removed with its precious burden to a room inside the monastery until after the ceremony of beatification when it could be exposed for public veneration.

The widow of the former Venetian Ambassador, Cappello, was present amongst others at the recognition for she had been staying in the monastery by a special permission of the Holy See for the past two years. Just before the translation of the holy body she had been seized by a terrible and mysterious sickness which no medicinal art could relieve, and little wonder for it was afterwards found out that her maid had been systematically poisoning her with a solution meant to kill rats, to which she added finely powdered glass and lime, administering this to her mistress with words of affectionate sympathy for her sufferings! At the moving of the body the Countess was inspired to ask for a particle of the habit, which she swallowed with lively faith. That evening she retired to bed and slept for ten hours and arose perfectly cured.

To describe the ceremonies for the beatification and the adornments in lights and hangings at St. Peter's would take too long, but there is one little particular of special interest to us which must not be passed over. Over the façade of the

great Basilica there hung next to the arms of the Pope and of the Cassinese Congregation those of the Cardinal Duke of York, Archpriest of St. Peter's. With Joanna were beatified St. Lawrence of Brindisi and Blessed Mary Anne of Jesus of the Order of Mercy.

Great were the rejoicings in Bassano where the people seemed to think that nothing was too much to show their joy. The monastery was too poor to do all it wanted and the Abbess, Dame Mary Ida Foppa, sent a circular to all the monasteries of the Venetian State asking for subscriptions. Several bishops ordered collections to be made in their dioceses. The Doge of Venice himself contributed, and the Cassinese Congregation was not behind hand. Passing over the wonderful description of decorations, illuminations, sermons, pictures, the music and poetry prepared in honour of their countrywoman, we may notice that an almost colossal statue of her was erected on a pedestal in the Piazza de Brocchi, the work of a Paduan sculptor, Felice Chierichina, and the gift of the Abbate Roberti. This last shewed his devotion to Joanna still more practically by collecting all he could about her in a volume of his work entitled *Opuscoli Bassanesi* and drawing up a catalogue of her writings. His brother Francis made a pen and ink portrait of the saint which he presented to the museum of the town.

One of the most interesting events of the Bassanese feasts in honour of their saint was the removal

of her body from the room where it had been taken a year before, to the church where it was placed in a niche above the altar and exposed for the first time to the veneration of the faithful. The new case to which the sacred remains were transferred was given by the Countess di Collalto and was very magnificently adorned. Six of the clergy bore it on their shoulders to the Church, accompanied by torches and lights, the singing of hymns and psalms in honour of the Beatified.

The Venetian States seemed delirious with joy, and the accounts given of the manifestations in her honour are marvellous. Amongst some of the lasting monuments was an altar erected to her at Assiago in Carrara marble inlaid with Sicilian jasper and adorned with verd antique ; its design and the richness of its materials are of great beauty and magnificence. It has now been removed to a new Church built in 1841, and is surmounted by a picture of the saint receiving Communion from the hands of an Angel.

The Beatification of their sainted sister was the last great event for the community of St. Jerome. For some years more they led their hidden daily lives of prayer and praise. The echoes of the revolution that was shaking almost the whole of Europe hardly reached their ears. They probably did not know how many communities in other countries had been chased from the walls where they had made their sacred Profession. They did not realise how day by day the tide of revolution

was nearing their own doors, and when, in 1810, it invaded the Venetian States they were rudely awakened to the realities of life. The thirty-eight who composed the community were mercilessly driven from their monastery in the name of the law, and placed in different houses, whilst their beloved home was turned into a sort of storehouse. The body of Blessed Joanna was, however, carefully preserved and removed to the Church of the Misericordia which joined the monastery garden and where the saint had once been rapt in ecstasy on the Feast of the Nativity of our Lady,

When, five years after, things grew better, few, indeed, of the monasteries were repeopled and St. Jerome's amongst others never again saw the daughters of St. Benedict within its cloisters. Only in 1880 some Augustinian nuns from Schio took up their abode there. Repairs were necessary on their coming and in making them the former grave of the servant of God was discovered in a cortile. There were even found the seals of the bishop of Vicenza and remains of the first coffin which had been burnt at the recognition of the body. The news spread all over the town and the place was besieged by people wanting relics, and others who hastened to bring crowns of flowers to cover the place where she had so long lain, for devotion to her had increased with time.

Still her feasts are kept and her intercession is implored with a faith and love incredible.

The monastery is even now full of the odour of

her holiness, and memories of her fill every corner. It was the *domus sanctificationis ejus* and it will be *in memoria æterna*. May she who dwelt therein a loving, faithful daughter of her great Patriarch St. Benedict, pray for his great family on earth and make it more and more fit for every good work.





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